



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07495483 9

SEÑORITA · MONTENAR



BY · ARCHER · P · CROVCH

1- Functions, Variables

2- Control Flow - Loops, If statements and Functions

2-a11

Cyanea

N.

W-10
COT

in the RD
1/14/16
316

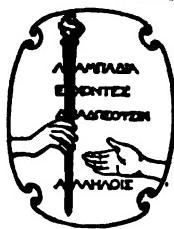
SEÑORITA MONTENAR

By ARCHER P. CROUCH

Author of "*Captain Enderis*"

"*On a Surf-Bound Coast*" etc.

DONATED BY THE
MERCANTILE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CITY



MERCANTILE
LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION
NEW YORK CITY

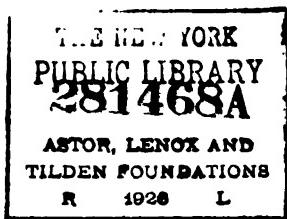
MERCANTILE LIBRARY.

NEW YORK.

II 346127

HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
1898

MS. A. 1. 1. v



Above the Wind
Sister Sun
Vastness

Copyright, 1898, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

TO
MY DEAREST WIFE

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
NEW YORK.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

CHAPTER I

THERE were at least two occasions in my early life when I, John Wildash, was on the point of putting a pistol to my head and blowing out my brains. The first time was at the conclusion of the court-martial held upon me when, as a sub-lieutenant at the age of twenty-five, I was dismissed the service. My crime was striking the first lieutenant on board His Majesty's frigate *Thunderer*.

For the offence itself I experienced no compunction. Indeed, supposing it had been condoned, I doubt not that, given equal provocation, I should have done the same again. The first lieutenant owed me a grudge because I had once disregarded his recall, when we were sent in boats to recover the brig *Annie Bell* from the Spaniards, who had captured it. It was in the Bay of Biscay in 1812, and I boarded and took possession of her with a single boat's crew. A year later he had his revenge. For some trifling remission of duty he rated me so roundly in the guard-room in the presence of other officers that my temper, always a quick one, passed beyond my control, and I struck him to the ground with my clinched fist.

I realized at once the consequences of such an indis-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

cretion. At a time when the very existence of England depended on the efficiency of her navy, and the country was gathering herself up for the final struggle with the Corsican usurper, discipline was of the first importance on English ships, and breaches of it were punished with extreme severity. Many an officer, for even the semblance of disregard for superior authority, had forfeited his chances of promotion, and my offence would, I knew, put an end to my career.

Still, in spite of this conviction, and with the sanguine temperament of youth, I had hoped against hope, and the sentence of the court-martial found me unprepared for it. At one blow it swept away all that made life worth living. I was passionately devoted to the sea, being proud of my profession, and longing to make my name illustrious, like Nelson, Collingwood, and Cochrane. All such aspirations were now abruptly dashed to the ground, and no hope remained of gaining the glory which I coveted. Well do I remember the mental torture I endured, when, at the conclusion of the trial, I took a solitary walk along the beach, and the chance meeting with a brother officer, which alone foiled my resolve to take my life.

Of the next few months I retain but a confused remembrance. For some little time, I believe, I clung to the hope of getting my sentence revoked, and myself reinstated in the navy; but being at length convinced of the futility of such a dream, I shipped one night at Southampton as second mate on board a merchantman bound for the west coast of South America. At times the thought had come to me—so attached was I to the naval profession—of offering my services to the government of France or Spain. But I was strong enough, thank God, to withstand a temptation which would entail the misfortune of having to fight against my own

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

country, and the only alternative left me was the merchant service.

The ship in which I sailed from England was wrecked by the carelessness of the first mate, just as we were entering the Bay of Valparaiso, and I found myself in a foreign port with no money in my pocket, and with only the clothes in which I swam ashore. I might have joined a ship which was homeward bound, but I could not endure the thought of returning to England, and ultimately succeeded in obtaining the berth of chief mate on a barque belonging to a Chilian merchant of Valparaiso. She was only a coasting vessel, trading no farther than Callao to the north and Valdivia to the south, but the business increased so rapidly that a second ship was soon bought, and I was made the captain of her.

I found more interest in the work than I expected, and the outbreak of the Chilian war of independence afforded me the additional excitement of having to evade the Spanish cruisers. At the beginning of the war the Chilians possessed no navy, and, though they soon acquired a few ships, they were so badly commanded that I could not bring myself to volunteer for the service. Besides, I was doing well in the post I occupied, being allowed to trade to a certain extent on my own account, in addition to receiving a fixed salary and commission on the cargo I obtained for my employer.

Such was the state of my affairs when, one afternoon in November of the year 1818, I anchored under the fort guns in Valparaiso Bay, with a rich load of grain from Talcahuano, having successfully eluded a Spanish frigate which was on watch outside the harbor. The owner of my ship, Señor José Martinez, who belonged to a noble Chilian family, and who had forfeited the esteem of his relations by condescending to engage in trade, soon came on board, greatly pleased by the safe arrival of his vessel.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Don José, a handsome man, with regular features, dark Spanish eyes, and hair just turning gray, congratulated me warmly on the favorable report which I was able to give him, and said: "This, then, must be the richest cargo, Señor Wildash, that has entered Valparaiso for many months. The Spanish cruisers have been so active that few ships have been able to gain the bay, and the price of corn has risen considerably. Come back with me and spend the night at my house, where we will celebrate your safe return."

The invitation placed me in an awkward position. Much as I esteemed Señor Martinez himself, there was an inmate of his house who was extremely distasteful to me. Young Don Luis Martinez, his son, seemed in my eyes to typify all that was most contemptible in the Chilian character. In the earlier days of my employment with the firm I had seen little of him, for he devoted himself to the frivolous occupations of the empty-headed youths who were his boon companions. Of late, however, he had manifested a disposition to take part in the conduct of his father's business, and in this capacity he had once or twice crossed my path in a way which I resented keenly. In answer, then, to Don José's invitation, I replied: "I am much indebted to you, Señor Martinez, for your kind offer, but I have some friends ashore who will be expecting me. To-morrow morning, perhaps—" I paused, and a cloud flitted over Don José's face. I felt that he was conscious of the reason which prompted my refusal, and was on the point of referring to it. If such had been his intention, he speedily abandoned it, and saying, "Till to-morrow, then, Señor Wildash!" he bade me good-day and returned to his boat.

I deviated somewhat from the truth when I said that there were friends of mine expecting me on shore. The fact was that I did not possess a friend in Valparaiso.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

No tie of sympathy united me to the small band of English traders in the town, who seemed bent on plundering the Chilians as rapidly as possible, so that they might have all the more time in England to spend the proceeds of their dishonest practices. To the Chilians themselves I was not sufficiently attracted to make among them an intimate friend. The members of the noble families were as proud as any Spaniard, while the merchant classes, though more easily approached, had few tastes in common with an Englishman as confirmed in his national prejudices as myself.

But although I had no friends, there was a very pleasant acquaintance of mine on shore, Antonio Valdez by name, proprietor of the "Fonda del Héspero," or "Inn of the Evening Star." He it was who gave me shelter when I walked into Valparaiso from the point where my ship was wrecked on the dark night on which I first set foot in Chile. From his wardrobe my drenched and tattered garments were replaced, and after a good supper a small but comfortable bedroom was put at my disposal. Antonio knew from the first that I had not saved any money from the wreck, and at that time there was no English consul in the town from whom he could claim to be refunded. Yet he took me in as readily as if I were a rich and honored guest, and kept me at his own expense for several weeks, refusing to discuss the question of the bill till I obtained my berth on board the Chilian trader.

To this friendly innkeeper my thoughts now returned, for I always spent a night or two at the "Fonda" when lying in Valparaiso Bay. As it was too late to commence unloading that evening, I put a few things together, and decided to go ashore at once.

On reaching deck again, I found that the sun had sunk beneath the horizon out to sea, leaving a fiery glow

SEÑORITA MONTE NAR

in the western sky which tinged the waves with blood and threw a purple hue upon the dull-red sandstone hills behind the town. I am not, as a rule, affected by what poets call the voice of Nature, being a man of action, and paying more attention to the voice of man. Neither have I any tendency towards the superstitious, but I must confess that, as I viewed the scene before me, I experienced a strange depression, which filled me with a vague foreboding of disaster.

At the gangway Rodrigo, the boatswain, approached me and asked leave to go ashore that night. Rodrigo was a model sailor on board, thoroughly up to his work, and keeping his men well in hand. But as soon as he set foot on land his character seemed to undergo a complete transformation. Obedient to the slightest word on quarter-deck, he rebelled against all alien authority on land, and, after a glass or two of Pisco, or Chilian brandy, at some sailors' tavern, the mere sight of a uniformed representative of the law would rouse the devil in him. To look at him now as he stood before me with his keen, well-cut features and his deferential air, he was the last man to suspect of riot and disorder.

"There is plenty of work for you to do on board this evening, Rodrigo," I answered—"derricks to be rigged up and hatches opened, ready for beginning work at daylight to-morrow morning."

"I have everything prepared, señor," he said. "It will not take my mate a quarter of an hour to finish what still remains."

He had sufficiently disposed of my first objection. I was obliged to think of some other reason for refusal.

"Why do you want to go ashore?" I asked. "You always get into trouble when you do. It is not as if you were a married man."

"Heaven forbid it!" interposed Rodrigo, fervently.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I smiled at his exclamation. Rodrigo would have nothing to do with women, and seemed actually to go in fear of them, though in a fight or a storm few men showed cooler courage. In spite of the popular conviction to the contrary, Venus and Mars do not always go hand in hand throughout the world.

"What, then, is your reason?" I inquired.

"I should like to pay a visit to my brother, señor."

I could hardly refuse a request which was based on this ground. His brother had been on board on several occasions, and as he was a steady fellow, who would be likely to see that Rodrigo did not get into trouble, I at length gave my consent.

By the time I set foot on the slippery wooden steps of the small landing-stage ashore, the last faint glow from the departed sun had faded away, and the lofty hills overshadowing the town stood out in dark relief against a star-lit sky. Walking along the poorly illuminated quay, I turned up one of the narrow streets leading to the main thoroughfare of the town. In this street stood the "Fonda del Héspero." It was a small, unpretentious inn, with the dining-saloon on the ground-floor, and as I entered the first person whom I saw was my good host, Antonio Valdez. He recognized me at once, and greeted me in demonstrative Chilian fashion.

"So you have come back again at last, Señor Wildash!" he exclaimed. "I was beginning to fear your ship had been captured, or sent to the bottom with a round ball through her side. But you must want some dinner, señor. Your favorite place is vacant, and you shall be served without delay," he added, leading the way to a corner of the room shut off by a high screen from the rest.

I was gratified by my host's warm welcome, and followed him to the table where I always sat when staying

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

at the "Fonda." The fare on board had been very indifferent, owing to the difficulty of obtaining provisions during the war. Besides, a meal on shore is always welcome after a long time spent at sea, and I looked forward with a relish to the dinner in store for me.

Antonio himself superintended the serving of it, and when I had done ample justice to the dishes set before me I called for a bottle of choice Urmeneta, and invited him to share it with me. My host, with his twinkling black eyes, his merry face, and his portly figure, seemed quite like an old friend when he sat down and raised his glass to drink my health. As the bottle passed between us the gloomy feelings I had experienced upon the ship were chased away, and the inn appeared to welcome me back, as though it were my home.

"And how have you been doing in my absence, Antonio?" I asked.

"I have not made my fortune, señor," he answered, with a laugh. "The war has raised the price of everything, and the patriots have no money to spend in the 'Fonda del Héspero.'"

"Perhaps the Royalists have fuller pockets?" I observed.

Antonio made a gesture significant of silence, and glanced round the screen to see what guests still remained in the saloon. Apparently his inspection satisfied him, for his round face broke into a smile, and, bending forward, he said: "A poor innkeeper, Señor Wildash, cannot afford to pick his guests. If the Royalists choose to come here, it is no fault of mine. I do not inquire who they are, as long as they pay their bills. Were I to refuse all but patriots, I should soon be starving."

"Have you many guests staying in the house?" I asked.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Only one lady from Santiago, with her daughter and a maid. But perhaps you know her, for she is the widow of Señor Montenar, who was a cousin of Señor Martinez."

I had heard of Señor Montenar, as being a connection of my employer's on his mother's side. The Montenars were descended from a Spanish nobleman of that name, and were exceedingly proud of the blood which ran in their veins. The family had been resident in Chile for several generations, having held high posts in the Spanish administration of the country, and taken full advantage of the opportunities thus afforded for acquiring a considerable fortune. The late representative of the line, Don Nicolas Montenar, had died just before the outbreak of the revolution, but his sympathies were, of course, all in favor of the Spanish *régime*. In answer to Antonio's question, I accordingly replied :

"I do not know the lady, but I have heard of her. She doubtless pays you well."

Antonio looked at me, and then raised his glass to his lips with a thoughtful air. As he put it down again he said, "Yes, señor, she pays me well, very well. But—you understand—the risk of incurring a visit from the patriot police—"

Here his sentence ended abruptly, for cries of "Antonio!" arose from the other end of the saloon, from a party of young men whose tongues had been loosed by the circulating wine. My host rose without delay, and I, after waiting in vain for his return, decided to take a breath of fresh air before retiring to my room.

On my way to the entrance I had to pass the table to which Antonio had been summoned, and I was surprised to find that one of the party was my employer's son, Don Luis Martinez. The young fellow had risen to his feet, and, already flushed with wine, was giving Antonio still

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

further orders, in a manner which excited the mirth of his companions. As I approached he caught sight of me, and I raised my hat with a formal bow, intending to pass out. I never sought a conversation with Don Luis, much less so now, when he was in such a foolish humor. But he would not allow me to evade him.

"Señor Wildash!" he cried, turning from Antonio and stepping in front of me.

"At your service, señor!" I replied, halting and facing him.

"I was not aware that you had returned!" he continued, in tones which seemed to infer that I should have reported myself to him.

"Indeed, señor!" I answered, quietly. "Your father is better informed, for he has been on board!"

At this his companions, with one exception, broke into a laugh. The exception, a man of medium height and some thirty years of age, whose dark eyes and Spanish cast of features were set off with a well-trimmed black beard, regarded me with silent scrutiny.

Don Luis had flushed angrily. "You have been long enough away, señor!" he retorted. "It would be a valuable cargo which would repay the keep of the ship for so long an interval."

The inference was most unjust, and, quick-tempered as I am, I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my self-control. Only a few hours previously his father had been congratulating me on my successful voyage. However, the speaker was young and foolish, besides being heated with wine, and I restrained myself sufficiently to answer:

"Señor Don Luis forgets that his country is at war, and that the Chilian ports are blockaded by the enemy."

"I understand, señor!" he answered, with a sneer. "It is fear which has detained you!"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I know not how it happened, but a moment later Don Luis's right cheek bore the marks of the heavy pair of leathern gloves which I carried in my hand, and then I saw before me a girl dressed in black, with a lace mantilla over her head, regarding me with dark, indignant eyes. "Señores!" she exclaimed, imperiously, "will you be good enough to let me pass?"

I stepped aside, and as Don Luis, who had his back to her, turned round, she recognized him, and went on:

"Is it you, cousin, taking part in a public brawl? I pray that you and this gentleman"—with a scornful glance at me—"will suspend your quarrel till my maid and I have passed through to our rooms."

The young fellow flushed a deep red, except where the fingers of my gloves had left white wales across his cheek. "Pardon me, Caritá!" he said, in evident distress at her rebuke. "I did not see you enter. I would not knowingly have made you a witness to this scene."

The young girl did not reply, but, followed by her maid, passed proudly on, not deigning to look again in my direction. On reaching, however, the foot of the staircase leading to the first floor, she hesitated, and finally, with a little less assurance in her carriage than before, walked back to where Don Luis stood. "Luis!" she said, in a changed voice, as she laid a white hand upon his coat-sleeve, and looked at him with anxious eyes, "this is only a trifling disagreement, is it not, which will easily be set right? It is not anything to quarrel about in earnest? You have black looks!"

Don Luis forced a smile and replied, evasively:

"Have no fear, cousin! The affair will doubtless soon be settled."

"And this gentleman!" she continued, turning round and looking at me disapprovingly. "He ought surely

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to be satisfied, for he struck the blow. He cannot wish to fight you. He is so much—so much older than you are!"

I bowed my head. Her eyes, though disapproving, fascinated me strangely, and my anger having passed as quickly as it came, I answered :

"I have no wish to quarrel, señorita ! My temper is a quick one, and if I have acted without sufficient provocation, I express my sorrow for it."

A look of relief came into the young girl's eyes, and, turning to her cousin again, she said :

"There now, Luis, this gentleman has apologized, and there is no further ground for quarrel. I trust you to let this matter drop," and with a formal bow to Don Luis's companions, and a scant acknowledgment of myself, she moved away.

As soon as she was gone the trim-bearded Spaniard—for so I took him to be—raised his eyebrows and looked at Don Luis, as though to ask if he were weak enough to be guided by his cousin's words. Thus incited, the young fellow turned to me and said : "Do I understand then, Señor Wildash, that you are prepared to make your apologies to me ?"

I had no wish to fight my employer's son, and accordingly answered : "What I said just now in the presence of a lady, I am willing to abide by."

The Spaniard shrugged his shoulders and gazed fixedly at nothing on the wall. Don Luis understood his gesture and went on : "Nothing will satisfy me but a formal and complete apology."

"Then you will remain unsatisfied !" I answered, my anger at length getting the better of me.

There was a gleam of satisfaction in Don Luis's eye at having gained his point.

"To what address may I send a friend ?" he asked.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Send him here!" I said, as, with a formal bow, I strode out from the room.

This was not a pleasant beginning to my return to Valparaiso, and as I walked along the narrow, ill-paved streets of the Chilian seaport, I reflected bitterly on the ill-luck which had brought about the quarrel. My temper, in truth, was somewhat hasty, but no man who had served as an officer in the English navy could brook being called a coward. It was still more unfortunate that the blow should have been given in the presence of a lady. This lady was evidently Sefiorita Montenar, for she had addressed Don Luis as her cousin. The rebuke of her dark eyes was still upon me, and, strangely enough—for I was a rough sailor, taking little heed of women—it made me feel uncomfortable. I could only hope that young Martinez's friends, knowing his excited state, would induce him to postpone the formal challenge till he had time to consider the matter in the sober light of day.

I was, then, disappointed, though hardly surprised, on my return to the "Fonda del Héspero," to find the trim-bearded Spaniard awaiting me there. As I looked into his face—for I had only glanced at him before—I fancied that his features were familiar to me. I could not remember, however, where I had seen him, and my efforts to recall him to my memory were interrupted by his advancing, hat in hand, and saying with a low bow:

"Sefior Wildash, I believe?"

"The same," I answered.

"I am deputed," he continued, "by Sefior Don Luis Martinez to arrange for him a meeting with you. I trust you will excuse this late hour for my call, but the gentleman whom I represent was anxious, if possible, to settle the affair to-morrow morning."

"In twenty-four hours' time," I said, glancing at my watch.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Pardon me! I was not aware that midnight had struck. It was for this morning that he wished it to be."

The challenge, of course, must be accepted, and there was now no chance of wiser counsels prevailing.

"May I ask your name?" I questioned.

"With your leave, señor, I would prefer it to remain unknown."

I looked keenly at him. Again his features seemed familiar, but, try as I would, I could not recollect where I had seen them.

"Then, of course," I answered, "the name of my second need not be disclosed either."

The Spaniard bowed. In truth I was hard pressed to think of a second. There was no acquaintance of mine in Valparaiso whom I would care to ask to act in the capacity. After puzzling my brain without success on the subject, Rodrigo, the boatswain, came suddenly into my thoughts. He was unknown by sight to Don Luis, having joined the ship at the last moment on the previous voyage, and, as no names were to be furnished, he would serve my purpose sufficiently well. I had to find him first, however; and telling Don Luis's representative that I would go and bring my man, I once more left the inn.

I had nothing to guide me as to Rodrigo's whereabouts, but, surmising that it would be best to visit the wine-shops most frequented by sailors, I was fortunate enough to find him in the first one that I entered. I hardly recognized the respectful boatswain in the figure which stood before me. Though dressed in his best clothes, such as a middle-class Chilian might wear, he was the centre of a noisy group of revellers, whose voices were all drowned by his. Evidently the Pisco had begun its work.

As I halted in the doorway, feeling that the mission

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

on which I had come was useless, Rodrigo caught sight of me, and, instantly recovering himself, advanced and saluted me.

"I was in need of your services, Rodrigo," I said, angrily; "but I see you are unfit to render them."

"Whatever you require, señor," he replied, quietly, "I am ready to perform."

His voice, though somewhat thick, was steady. I scanned him carefully. He returned my gaze with such composure that I could not believe him incapacitated by drink. In any case, I determined to trust him, for there was no alternative.

"Listen to me, Rodrigo," I said, as I drew him aside. "I am to fight a duel this morning. Do you think you could second me and see fair play?"

At the mention of a fight Rodrigo's black eyes glistened with excitement.

"Give me the chance, señor!" he answered, eagerly.

When we reached the "Fonda del Héspero" we found the Spaniard pacing restlessly up and down the deserted saloon, which was lighted by a single pair of candles. He turned sharply round on our approach, and looked with some surprise at my companion.

"This is my representative, señor," I said. "He will doubtless inform me in good time of your plans for the meeting. Meanwhile I will bid you good-night," and I retired to my room to get what sleep I could before the morning.

CHAPTER II

IT was still dark when Rodrigo roused me some three or four hours later. I had been dreaming of my old home in Devonshire, and of the garden with its southern wall loaded with peaches, the luscious flavor of which, as I remembered them in my youth, has never been equalled by the choicest tropic fruit that I have tasted since. In my dream I was walking in the garden with my mother, who was telling me, as she had often done before, of the brave deeds of my father—he had been killed in an engagement with the Spanish squadron off Finisterre—and exhorting me to grow up worthy of him. Her words still seemed to linger in my ears when Rodrigo's summons restored my consciousness.

As I had thrown myself upon my bed only partially undressed, it was not long before I was ready. So as not to disturb the other inmates of the "Fonda," we descended with great caution, and let ourselves noiselessly out into the narrow street. Rodrigo led the way into the main thoroughfare, turning to the right in the direction of the hill on which stood the fort at the entrance to the bay. Dawn seemed to hover in the air, but the horizon where it should appear was still hidden from us by the house-tops. The streets were deserted except for the watchmen, and a mongrel here and there, which slunk away on our approach from the garbage that attracted it.

So far we had not exchanged a word, but now I spoke: "You have arranged everything, Rodrigo?" I asked.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Everything, señor," he replied.

"What are the weapons?"

"Pistols. I have them with me," calling my attention to a case which he was carrying.

I was glad that pistols had been chosen. If it had been with swords I might, in the heat of the engagement, have been betrayed into giving a fatal blow. My skill with the steel was above the average, for I had made a careful study of its use. My temper, too, would make me fight to win, and I did not wish to win on this occasion. Don Luis was barely twenty, while I was at least ten years his senior. He had but small experience with the sword, and I knew that with this weapon he stood no chance against me.

With pistols, however, we were on even terms. In fact, it was he who would have the advantage, for I had decided to fire into the air. His challenge was probably the result of a brain heated with wine, and was now upheld only by his sense of honor. I may have had another reason for my determination. I had been stung by Señorita Montenar's reference to my age, and I resolved to show her that it was not my custom to fight in earnest with mere boys.

We had now left the town, and were ascending a rugged track by the edge of the cliff. The light had increased perceptibly within the last few minutes, and, although the sun was not yet up, the horizon out to sea was visible. Passing the fort on the left, we saw two men awaiting us on a level piece of ground beyond it.

"They are in time, señor," remarked Rodrigo, with a dry smile.

I did not answer, for we were already up to them, exchanging formal bows. Young Don Luis looked pale but resolute, while his companion bore himself with an

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

air of punctilious ceremony that grated peculiarly upon my senses.

As the two seconds made their arrangements I gazed out upon the view, and could not help being struck by the peaceful beauty of the scene before me, so much in contrast with the purpose for which we had come out. Above the lofty Andes, to the east, the sky was tinted with a delicate shade of pink, the herald of the rising sun. Beneath me, on the blue waters of the bay, a white-sailed fishing-boat was dancing lightly on the waves.

I was roused from my silent contemplation by Rodrigo's voice. "No, señor," he was saying to the Spaniard, with decision in his tones, "not in that direction; Señor Wildash would have the sun directly in his line of fire."

I noticed that Don Luis's second was pacing out the distance from east to west. At Rodrigo's protest he looked up angrily, but, a small arc of the sun now rising above the summit of the mountains and shining straight into his eyes, he was obliged to acknowledge the justice of it, and marked out the ground from south to north.

We were soon in our places. Don Luis, though still pale, took with a steady hand the pistol which Rodrigo gave to him. He wore a Spanish cloak, and the fresh breeze catching the cape caused it to flap against his arm. I was speculating how far this might interfere with the correctness of his aim when his second gave the order to fire. I stood quite still, without raising my pistol till Don Luis's bullet whizzed over my head. I then deliberately discharged my weapon into the air. Rodrigo was at my side in a moment.

"What is the matter, señor?" he exclaimed, with an expression of amazement.

"Nothing, Rodrigo, only I do not intend to fire at him."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Oh, but it is madness!" he answered, hotly. "That young coxcomb will shoot you down like a dog. I shall stop the duel!" and, Don Luis's second approaching at this moment, Rodrigo said to him :

"I suppose, señor, that you are both satisfied, and that the fight is at an end?"

"On the contrary, señor," replied the Spaniard, with his detestable correctness of demeanor, "I have come to lodge a protest on my principal's behalf. The shots should be fired simultaneously, and it is an abuse of the laws of duelling to wait till your opponent has discharged his weapon and then take deliberate aim at his unprotected person."

I burned at this totally unfounded charge, though with an effort I managed to control myself. Not so Rodrigo. With flashing eyes he gave the Spaniard the lie direct, and in another moment the matter would have ended in two duels instead of one had I not interposed.

"Let it be as my opponent's second wishes, the two pistols to be simultaneously discharged."

Rodrigo sullenly consented, and Don Luis and myself, taking up our positions again, awaited the word to fire. This time my second gave it, and as I swung up my weapon to fire well into the air I felt a stinging blow on my right arm, and at the same moment my opponent fell.

When we reached him, the blood was flowing freely from a wound in the thigh, and he seemed to be in great pain. There was no doctor in attendance, but his second, who seemed ill at ease, said that a carriage was waiting at the back of the fort. Rodrigo, meanwhile, cut away the cloth around the wound, and bound it up with a white silk handkerchief which hung loosely round Don Luis's shoulders. When this was done he and the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Spaniard lifted the wounded man and carried him in the direction of the carriage.

Don Luis had fainted by the time they reached the vehicle, and the Spaniard's agitation had considerably increased. When his charge was deposited within as comfortably as could be arranged, and Rodrigo and I prepared to take our departure, he begged us to accompany him.

"I am not known in Valparaiso," he urged, "and if I should be found driving through the streets with a wounded man I might have difficulty in explaining my position."

"It is not far to Don Luis's home," I answered.

"No, but the only way to it lies through the town."

At this point a voice was heard within the carriage, and Don Luis, having recovered consciousness and heard what we were saying, murmured faintly,

"Take me to the 'Fonda del Héspero.'"

There was no reason why his wishes should not be obeyed, and the Spaniard and myself entered the carriage, while Rodrigo mounted beside the driver. It is curious how at such times the mind has a trick of noticing trifles. In spite of the gravity of my position I remember that a sail in the offing attracted my attention, and, recognizing her as an English vessel, I idly speculated from what place she had sailed and for what port she was bound.

Don Luis's groans, as the carriage jarred and jolted over the uneven ground, soon brought back my mind to the scene in which I was taking part. His second, much alarmed by these sounds, insisted, when we reached the town, on closing the windows and pulling down the blinds, so as to escape observation as far as possible. Fortunately it was only a short distance to the "Fonda del Héspero," and no one was to be seen in the little by-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

street when the carriage stopped at the door and we carried Don Luis into the house.

Antonio, who had only just come down, was in no humor to admit into the "Fonda" a wounded man, who might die at any moment and give rise to unpleasant inquiries on the part of the authorities. The Spaniard, however, took him aside, and after a little conversation was successful, apparently, in gaining his consent, for when they rejoined us the innkeeper said he would lead the way to a room which should be put at Don Luis's disposal.

Just as we were preparing to move the wounded man from the couch where we had laid him, I became aware that Señorita Montenar was standing at the bottom of the stairs. She evidently did not realize what was going on, and, not expecting to find company in the inn at such an early hour, was hesitating before passing through the room, when Don Luis uttered a deep groan of pain. In a moment she had advanced to where we stood and said :

"What is it, señores? Is some one hurt?"

No one answered, but her quick eyes, in spite of the fact that we tried to hide him from her view, soon caught sight of Don Luis. Running past us, she threw herself down by the side of the couch, and, taking his hand in hers, exclaimed :

"What is the matter, Luis? Tell me, dear cousin. Have you had an accident?"

But Don Luis only groaned, and when the señorita saw that the silk handkerchief, which still bound his wound, was stained with blood, she uttered a little cry and sprang to her feet.

"I understand!" she said, indignantly, as she turned and faced us; "he has been trapped into a duel. Are you the brave gentleman," she continued, looking round at me, "whose deed this is?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I silently assented. It was useless to try and enter into explanations.

"I took what you said last night, señor," she went on, "as a pledge that you would not provoke a fight. It seems, however, that your code of honor does not prevent you breaking your word when it is only given to a woman. And you, Don Guido Villamil," she added, turning to the Spaniard, "could you do nothing to prevent it? But I am only wasting precious time. Antonio and this gentleman," indicating Rodrigo, "are sufficient to carry my cousin to his room. We can dispense with the services of the other two señores."

Her words created such a ferment in my mind that it was not till I had walked some little distance from the "Fonda" that I became aware of the presence of Don Luis's representative. Then the name by which the señorita had addressed him came suddenly back to me, and, looking at him, I recalled his face. He seemed to be aware of what had happened, and said, with his forced smile: "So, Señor Wildash, you have recognized me at last! I knew you the moment you approached our table last night. A Spaniard does not easily forget an injury. Your recapture of the *Annie Bell* delayed my promotion for full five years."

I remembered all about him now. Señor Don Guido Villamil was the Spanish lieutenant in command of the prize I had retaken when I ignored my senior officer's recall. He had made a brave stand himself, but his crew had been induced to surrender by a ruse which I adopted of secretly detaching a portion of my party to man the boat again, so as to give the impression, when they reappeared, that we were receiving reinforcements. The Spanish officer had been greatly angered by the trick, and during the few days that elapsed before he was ex-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

changed with his crew for some English prisoners he would hold no communication with me.

"Do you still serve your country, Señor Villamil?" I asked.

"I do, señor, and am now engaged in a secret mission here, to learn the state of the enemy's armament and forces. But I can trust to the honor of an English gentleman not to betray me." It was a bold avowal. If handed over to the patriot police he would undoubtedly have forfeited his life. Of course I could not give information against a man who had thus placed himself within my power, and I said :

"You can trust me, Señor Villamil, but let me tell you this: My sympathies are with the brave nation which is striving to throw off the heavy Spanish yoke, and if I meet you again in this town I shall certainly inform against you."

Don Guido bowed with his excess of ceremony and answered :

"You will not meet me again in Valparaiso, for I have fulfilled my mission here, and shall be serving my country more actively in a day or two. My only regret is that Señor Wildash does not belong to the navy of the country which enlists his sympathies, so that I might try conclusions with him with more success than fell to my lot six years ago."

With a final flourish of his hat the fellow turned on his heels and walked jauntily away. I was glad to be quit of his company, though I could not dismiss him from my thoughts. What was his connection, I wondered, with Don Luis Martinez? Had he been trying to win him over to the Spanish cause, against those who were endeavoring to set his country free? Don Luis was an impressionable youth, and his sympathies had always been more with the old-established Chilian fami-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

lies who were in favor of the Spanish rule than with the merchant classes and the great mass of the people, who were struggling against it. Then, too, he might have an additional attraction to the cause of the old country in the person of his handsome cousin, Señorita Montenar.

I had no further time to spend on such reflections. It was evident that Don Luis's father would hear of the duel from one source or another, and it was best that he should hear of it from me. Luis was an only son, and Don José took great pride in him. Although the young fellow was not hit in a vital part, his wound might prove dangerous on account of fever or other complications, and the task before me was not a pleasant one. Again I cursed my hasty temper, which had caused me to succumb to the provocation I had received, though I began to see that the quarrel was of Don Guido's making, and that in any case I should probably have been unable to avoid it.

Busy with these thoughts, I made my way in the direction of Don José's house. It was situated on the hills overlooking the town, and enjoyed in consequence a more extensive prospect and fresher air. But the ascent to it was steep, and the sun struck hot, for it was nearing midsummer in the southern hemisphere. I was glad when I gained the walled garden with which the building was surrounded, and, entering by the wooden gate, walked up to the house beneath the welcome shade of a row of lofty eucalyptus-trees.

I had spent some pleasant hours here in the earlier days of my connection with Señor Martinez, before the assumption of authority on the part of Don Luis began to make the place distasteful to me. In those times Don José had been very hospitable, and many a bottle of wine had we drunk together, seated beneath the trees, when I

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

would render an account of my transactions during a voyage but recently accomplished, or he would talk of plans for future operations.

My heart was heavy, then, at the thought of the news which I had to break to so kind a friend. He would, of course, be very agitated and distressed, though I had no doubt that I should be able to show how little the duel was of my seeking. The man-servant who appeared in answer to my knock, and who knew me well by sight, said that his master would soon be free, but that he was at present attending to an urgent letter which had just been brought to him by special messenger. Meanwhile, would señor come in and wait?

I followed him into a sitting-room on the right, with French windows leading out on to a terrace which overlooked the garden. Standing at one of these windows, I gazed out upon the scene. A pleasant buzz of insect life arose from the creepers covering the trellis-work, and the perfume of sweet flowers was wafted in on the fresh morning breeze. In the distance lay the deep-blue waters of the harbor, with here and there white-crested waves.

But my attention was soon distracted from the view. A quick step in the hall, the door roughly thrown open, and Don José stood before me, a letter in his hand. There was a pallor on his cheek and a flash of anger in his eye such as I had never seen before.

"After the affair of last night, señor, of which this letter gives me information," he began, in stern and formal accents, "I hardly expected the honor of a visit from you. I find it impossible to understand the wanton provocation which you gave my son."

I was so astounded by his manner and his words that I could frame no answer. Some one had evidently been writing him a grossly misleading account of the occur-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rence. Seeing that I did not speak, he went on, impatiently,

"But no doubt you have come to give an explanation, to tell me that, having apologized for your unprovoked attack, the meeting to which my son was in honor bound to challenge you will not take place."

"I regret to say, señor—"

"What! Do you intend to fight him, then?"

My anger was roused by his overbearing attitude.

"I do not intend to fight him, because I have already done so," was my answer.

Don José tottered and grasped the back of a chair for support.

"Then you come to tell me," he said, in low, measured tones, with one hand upon his heart, "that you have killed him."

"No, señor, but he is wounded, and lies at the 'Fonda del Héspero.' In justice to myself, however—"

"I have heard enough. I am going now to my son, but this evening I will pay you all I owe you, and then may I never look upon your face again. That letter will explain, if your own conscience does not do so!" and throwing the letter which he held in his hand upon the table, he hastened from the room.

I took up the letter with a great wrath in my heart and read as follows :

"To SEÑOR DON JOSÉ MARTINEZ :—

"One who should have known better, the English captain in your employ, has, without any provocation, picked a quarrel with your son. Don Luis acted with great self-command, but, on receiving at length a blow in the face, had no alternative but to demand satisfaction. The Englishman's unreasonable conduct can only be explained on the assumption that the wine had mounted to his head. I trust that this letter will reach Señor Don José in time to prevent a duel.

A TRUE FRIEND TO DON LUIS."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

It seemed, then, that Señor Martinez preferred to believe a correspondent who had not dared to sign his name rather than a man who in five years' service had never given reason for distrust. I did not know whether I was more incensed against the writer or the recipient of the letter. On Don José's behalf, however, the natural anxiety of a father for an only son might be urged as some excuse for his hasty judgment, while no palliation could be found for the preposterous slander of the anonymous writer. Who could it be? I thought at once of Don Guido Villamil. He had recognized me on the previous evening, and had evidently written the letter then, refraining from despatching it till he found that it was Don Luis, not myself, who was the victim of the duel. In fact, he must have had the letter in his pocket when we parted barely half an hour previously, and sent it off post-haste by special messenger, to work its spite before I could give my version of the story.

Filled with anger against this contemptible action on the Spaniard's part, I left the house by the open window, and, retracing my steps down the garden, found myself again without its walls. Here the full gravity of my position forced itself upon me. What if Don Luis died? Unless I left the town as soon as it occurred I should certainly be arrested and examined at the inquiry which would be held with regard to the cause of his death. Every facility was given at that time for the escape of a man who had killed another in a duel, but if he persisted in remaining where he was the authorities were obliged to seize him and inflict some penalty, small though it might be. Apart from such considerations, I was very far from being indifferent to causing the death of a young man whose faults were perhaps more those of youth than character.

Heavy with these thoughts, I made my way to the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

lower town, and, not caring to run the chance of encountering Señor Martinez at the "Fonda del Héspero," I dropped into another tavern, which I sometimes frequented. Nothing had passed my lips that morning, but I had no appetite, though I allowed the waiter to set something on the table in front of me. There I sat for a long time, making a pretence of eating, but only able to take a glass or two of wine. Every minute I expected to receive a message that the worst had happened, and that I must fly the town.

By noon the suspense became more than I could bear, and I set out for the "Fonda del Héspero." Antonio was not in the saloon, a most unusual thing with him at this time of the day, and one which increased my anxiety still further. On ascending the stairs, however, I met him coming down.

"How is he, Antonio?" I asked.

Antonio shook his head; "I am afraid it is a serious wound, señor," he answered. "He is very feverish, and the doctor is evidently anxious. Señorita Montenar is nursing him, and his father is also in the room."

I entered my apartment and dropped into a chair. For the second time in my career my hasty temper seemed destined to drive me from the calling which I followed. What was the use of attempting at my age to begin life anew? My dream of the early morning, and my mother's gentle voice, exhorting me to follow in my father's footsteps, came back to me with all the vividness with which I had heard them then. But was it all my fault? Had my father ever had equal provocation? and if he had resisted could his natural temperament have been as hot as mine? In the affair of the previous evening, the presence of Don Guido Villamil made it almost certain that Don Luis had been incited at all costs to provoke a duel, and that I could not have

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

avoided it without tarnishing my honor. Fate was evidently against me, and further struggling with it hopeless.

This view was soon confirmed in my mind by a letter from Señor Martinez. Having gone to the office and caused the accounts to be made up, he enclosed a draft on the bank for what was owing to me, and expressed a hope that he would never see me again unless it was to obtain satisfaction in case Don Luis's wound proved fatal. Thus only a few hours had sufficed to turn a kind-hearted friend into a bitter enemy. Even a stranger had conceived the worst possible estimate of my character, and Señorita Montenar, whose dark eyes still seemed to be upbraiding me, had put me down as a bully who preyed upon young men of spirit, and who could not keep the word he had given in public to a lady. For the second time in my life I was tempted to put an end to my existence.

I had reached the lowest depths of my despair when there came a knock at the door, and Rodrigo entered. He was in his board-ship clothes, and as he stood there, cap in hand, with his respectful bearing, he bore little resemblance to the man who had played the part of my second so efficiently that morning.

"What is it, Rodrigo?" I exclaimed, considerably surprised to see him. The ship, I knew, must be discharging cargo, and his presence would be required on board.

Rodrigo hesitated, as if he were casting about for a suitable way in which to express himself. At length he said :

"Is it true, señor, that—that you are no longer captain?"

Señor Martinez had apparently lost no time in making my dismissal known.

"It is quite true, Rodrigo," I replied.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The boatswain seemed relieved.

"Then I am glad I did as I have done."

"What have you done, Rodrigo?"

"When the chief officer told me that he was captain of the ship, I answered that I should not believe it till I had heard it from you. He then said that the ship wanted a new boatswain as well as a new captain, so I packed up my things and came ashore."

I could not help being gratified by Rodrigo's loyalty, though I was compelled at the same time to rebuke him for it.

"You were very foolish to throw up a good berth," I said, "because of a change of captains. My case is different. The young fellow I wounded this morning is Señor Martinez's son, and of course I cannot now remain in his employ."

Rodrigo was evidently astonished, but he only said :

"I am glad you did not let him off the second time, señor."

"I had intended to fire in the air again, but his shot grazed my arm and made me pull the trigger involuntarily."

Rodrigo looked at my arm.

"Do you know, señor," he said, "that your shirt is stained with blood?"

I had not noticed it, but now saw that what he said was true, though I attached no importance to it.

"It is nothing," I replied.

But Rodrigo insisted on examining the arm, and when my coat was taken off he found my shirt-sleeve saturated with blood from the elbow downward. The boatswain set about cutting away the linen from the wound, and then, bathing the place with water, succeeded in removing the patch that had stuck to the skin. This operation caused the wound to break out bleeding again, and, faint

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

from my long fast, as well as from the anxieties to which I had been subjected, I swooned away.

When I came to myself again I was lying on my bed with my right arm neatly bandaged and the faithful boatswain at my side. In a few minutes Antonio appeared with a basin of chicken broth, which he made me take. This so refreshed me that, when he had gone, I told Rodrigo that I did not need him any longer, and that he must return to the ship and make his peace with my successor. This, however, he stoutly refused to do, saying that he preferred my service.

"But, Rodrigo," I objected, "I am in command of no ship, and am not at all confident that I shall ever get another."

"Señor will be given a ship as soon as he applies for one," replied Rodrigo. "Till then I will serve him on shore."

I was about to remonstrate with him for attaching himself to me when my fortunes were at so low an ebb, when the sound of distant cheering reached my ears. Rodrigo went to the bay-window, which commanded, down the street, a view of a small portion of the harbor, and said that a barque flying the English flag had just anchored, and was being surrounded with a swarm of boats. I knew that it must be the vessel I had observed that morning as we were leaving the scene of the duel, and, being curious about her, I bade Rodrigo go and ascertain the cause of the excitement she aroused. It was not long before he returned. From the light in his eyes I could see his news was out of the common.

"What have you got to tell me, Rodrigo?" I asked, impatiently, for he did not speak at once, perhaps from lack of breath, caused by the haste with which he had performed his mission.

"He is on board, señor!" Rodrigo exclaimed, in gasps.

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

"The governor is going off—to welcome him—there will be a grand reception!"

"Who is on board?" I cried, testily. "Why, where are your wits, Rodrigo?"

"Lord Cochrane, señor! Did I not say so?"

I jumped up from my bed. Lord Cochrane, the hero of a hundred fights, the man who excited my admiration more than any other naval officer alive, had actually arrived in Valparaiso! Of course, I knew that the Chilian government had asked him to help them against the Spaniards, and had offered him the command of their navy; but that was more than a year ago, and no definite news had been received of his acceptance of the offer. His name alone would have as terrorizing an effect upon the enemy as the addition of half a dozen frigates to the Chilian fleet. I no longer entertained any doubt as to the issue of the war, and would have gone out then and there to offer my services, had not my weakness and Rodrigo's intervention prevented the design.

"I will go to-morrow, then!" I said, as I sank back on my pillow.

CHAPTER III

THE following morning I awoke with daybreak, thoroughly refreshed by a good night's rest, and suffering no pain or inconvenience from my wound. My first care was to inquire after Don Luis, and I was much relieved when Antonio told me that the critical point had been passed, and that there was every hope of his final recovery. I then sent Rodrigo to obtain news of Lord Cochrane's movements, and he returned with the information that he had spent the night on board, but would land at noon, for which hour a grand reception was being prepared for him. I determined to try and see him before he left the ship.

But I soon found that it was one thing to decide on visiting a great man, and another to obtain an audience with him. I had no personal acquaintance with Lord Cochrane. When in the English navy, I was of course considerably his junior, and though always anxious to serve under him, I had not even been on the same station, much less the same ship with him. There was consequently little chance of his knowing my name. His deeds, however, were familiar to every member of the English navy. Shortly after I joined the service he performed, as captain of the *Speedy*—a small brig with fifty-four men—the marvellous exploit of capturing the *El Gamo*, a large Spanish frigate with a crew of three hundred and nineteen men. It may be readily conceived how my youthful imagination was fired by such a deed, and how I longed to be associated with the hero of it.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Engaging a boat at the landing-stage, I put off from the shore, and soon found myself among a number of small craft struggling to reach the gangway of the English ship on which Lord Cochrane was. My hopes of obtaining an audience fell, as I saw how few were allowed on board. At length my boatman succeeded in forcing his way to the gangway, and the English officer who stood at the foot of it demanded, in such Spanish as he was master of, what I wanted. I replied in English that I wished to see Lord Cochrane, and although the officer's manner was less harsh on finding that I was a fellow-countryman, he said that the governor of the town was now closeted with his lordship, and that it would be two or three hours before he had received all the high officials who were waiting to see him.

There was no alternative, then, but to return to the shore and watch an opportunity of gaining an audience with Lord Cochrane there. After breakfast at the "Fonda," I made my way to the large square between the landing-stage and the governor's house, not because I hoped to get a word with the great naval officer during his public reception, but from curiosity to see the man of whom I had heard so much.

I found the square packed with a dense crowd of people. The report of Lord Cochrane's arrival had aroused the utmost enthusiasm, and the whole of Valparaiso had come out to do him honor. Every window in the square was filled and every foot of ground was covered. With great difficulty I reached a point near the landing-stage, where the governor, surrounded by distinguished soldiers and civilians, waited to receive his illustrious guest.

At length loud cheers announced that the boat containing Lord Cochrane and his family had put off for the shore, and the uproar was tremendous when it reached the landing-stage. My view of the steps was

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

intercepted by those privileged to stand upon the stage, but presently, at the end of the passage which was kept open for him, appeared a tall, spare man, with a lady on his arm. A nurse with a child in arms, and a boy of five years of age, followed at a short interval.

Although Lord Cochrane wore no kind of uniform, there was something in his carriage which revealed the bold and resolute naval officer that he was. In the prime of life—at that time he was only forty-three years old—he retained a youthful gait and figure. As he stopped to return the governor's salutation I had a good view of his face, and was specially struck by the brightness of his eyes and the quick, comprehensive way in which they seemed to note every detail of his great reception. Lady Cochrane was a beautiful woman, and her fresh English complexion excited the greatest admiration among the dark-eyed Chilians. I had only a moment to observe the scene, for the governor now led the way to his house down the narrow passage in the crowd, which was kept open by the military.

It was not till I began to make my way back to the "Fonda del Héspero" that I realized the full extent of the excitement aroused in the Chilian port by the arrival of the famous English sea-captain. Every street was gay with bunting, and so crowded with people returning from the reception of the hero that it was almost impossible to move in them. I was proceeding slowly along the main thoroughfare, and had reached the opening to a narrow passage on the right, which ran up to the principal church in the town, when I saw two women standing by it, evidently afraid to cross the stream of people. The taller of the two, whose face I could not see at first, now turned, and I recognized Señorita Montenar, though she did not look in my direction. It was clear what had occurred. The señorita had been to church with her

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

maid, and was cut off by the crowd from the "Fonda del Héspero," which lay on the farther side of the main thoroughfare. Seeing that she was in need of an escort, I made my way towards her, in order to offer her my services.

The señorita, watching the crowd with anxious eyes, did not see me till, raising my hat, I said :

"If the señorita will allow me, I will escort her to the 'Fonda,' or wherever she wishes to go. The crowd is a rough one, and hardly fit for a lady to venture in alone."

She looked at me as I began to speak, and started when she recognized me. I even fancied her eyebrows contracted with an expression of displeasure. Her maid, however, seemed much relieved by my offer, and said to her mistress :

"If señor accompanies us, we shall get back in safety."

The idea of accepting my escort was evidently distasteful to Señorita Montenar, but after another despairing look at the crowd, which seemed, if possible, still noisier and more closely packed, she turned to me and said:

"We wish to return to the 'Fonda del Héspero.' If señor will lead the way, my maid and I will follow."

The manner of her acceptance of my offer was far from gracious, and, unaccustomed to hold myself at the beck and call of womenfolk, it angered me not a little. My services, however, were plainly needed, and, bowing formally, I turned and led the way up the passage, in order to make a détour and cross the main road farther on, where I hoped the crowd would be less pressing. Passing along several deserted by-streets, where there was no sound but those of my own footsteps and the softer foot-fall of the women, I made one or two descents to the main thoroughfare, only to turn back on finding it as

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

closely packed as ever. At length, when we had wandered some distance, and reached a point where the crowd seemed less dense, I turned and said :

“ Shall we cross here, señorita ? We may have to go twice as far and fare no better.”

The señorita glanced at the stream of people, then, making up her mind, she answered :

“ Yes, señor, we must cross here. It is getting late, and my mother will wonder what has kept us so long.”

I advanced into the street, stemming the current as well as I could, in order to leave a clear passage for the women. In this way we had nearly reached the opposite side, when a gang of common men, who were forcing their way noisily through the crowd, came down upon us. I was powerless to arrest their progress, and in a moment they were pushing us roughly in front of them. Fortunately we were carried along to the entrance to a side street, and, watching my opportunity, I seized the two women and snatched them out of the surging throng.

Señorita Montenar disengaged herself hastily as soon as we were clear of the crowd, and, with a heightened color, said :

“ Surely we are through the worst part now. Lead on, señor, and let us get back quickly.”

So once again I led the way by myself. The by-streets were comparatively empty, and I did not once turn to address a remark to the two women following me till I had brought them safely to the doors of the “ Fonda del Héspero.” Here I stood aside to allow them to enter, and, while the maid was sent on to announce their safe arrival, the señorita, evidently feeling that she owed me some thanks, looked up with a certain air of hesitation and said :

“ I am indebted to you, señor, for safely escorting my maid and myself through the crowd, though, to speak

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

the truth"—here she turned away her face—"I could have wished that—that it had not been you!"

I was stung by her outspoken words.

"I am sorry to hear, señorita," I replied, "that my presence is so distasteful to you."

She glanced up at me swiftly, and turned as though to enter the "Fonda." She had hardly taken a step, however, before she halted, as if she had something else which she wished to say.

"No doubt you think, señor," she resumed, "that I have been sight-seeing, with all that dreadful crowd. But it is not so. I have only been to church to offer up my thanksgiving for the improvement in my cousin's health."

"I had heard that he was better, señorita," I replied.

She took no notice of this remark, evidently wishing to make it clear how it was that she was in the streets on such a morning.

"When I started out to go to church there were only few people in the streets. I noticed the flags hanging from the windows, but did not know, and do not even now know, what it is all about."

"Lord Cochrane, the great English naval officer, has come," I said.

"Is it the same Lord Cochrane who used to prey upon the Spanish coast when your country was at war with Spain?" she asked.

"The same," I answered.

"Ah! I have heard of him. They say he is nothing less than a lawless buccaneer, pillaging, burning, and destroying wherever he lands! I hope I may never see his face!" and with a formal bow she passed within the house.

It was easy to perceive that she had derived her ideas about Lord Cochrane from Spaniards, or from Spanish

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

sympathizers, and it set me thinking how far she and her mother were interested in the hope that Spain would win the day against the patriots. From Señor Martinez's own remarks about them, as well as their choice of the "Fonda del Héspero," and their acquaintance with the Spanish officer, Don Guido Villamil, it appeared that their sympathies were with the old *régime*. If, however, they had gone so far as to stake all their fortune on the issue, I felt convinced, now that Lord Cochrane had appeared on the scene, that they could not fail to end by being losers. In that case, what would be the future of this stately daughter of an ancient house?

The governor was giving in the evening a grand dinner in honor of the English sea-captain, and I saw that there was no chance of obtaining an interview with him that day. On the following morning I repaired to the governor's house by ten o'clock, hoping to catch his guest before the rush of visitors began. To my great disappointment, however, I heard that he had already left for Santiago, where he was to stay with the President of the Republic, General O'Higgins. It would be useless to follow him to the capital, where, amid all the festivities given in his honor, he would have no time for granting business interviews; but I decided to write him a brief note, stating who I was, and asking for a commission in the navy which he was to organize.

Lord Cochrane's visit to Santiago was prolonged from week to week, but I received no answer to my letter. I might have written again, in case my first note had been mislaid, but I was losing heart, and felt that my only chance lay in an interview when he returned to Valparaiso. Meanwhile, glowing accounts of the festivities held in his honor kept reaching the Chilian seaport, till I began to think that the gayeties of the capi-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

tal had made him forget the object for which he had come out to Chile. I was mistaken, however. At a great public dinner he reminded the president that his mission was "fighting, not feasting," and I knew that he meant to set to work as soon as possible.

Shortly after this Lord Cochrane returned to Valparaíso, and I at length got the opportunity for which I had waited so long. Calling on the day after his arrival at the house which he had taken, I found the court-yard filled with people waiting to see him—Chilian naval officers, shipwrights, provision contractors, and representatives of every class connected with the equipping of a fleet. Giving my card to the man-servant standing at the entrance to the house, I resigned myself to a long spell of waiting.

I had not, however, been there more than half an hour when the man appeared and beckoned me to follow him. After ascending a flight of steps to the first floor, I was ushered into a front room, where I found Lord Cochrane bending over a large table strewn with charts and documents of various kinds.

He looked up quickly at my entrance, and, motioning me to a chair, began :

"What can I do for you, Captain Wildash?"

It was evident that he had not received my letter.

"I wrote to your lordship when in Santiago," I replied, "but it seems that my letter did not reach its destination."

"I remember no communication in your name, Captain Wildash."

"It contained an application for a commission in the fleet which is being organized."

Lord Cochrane's expression underwent a change. He took up my card, which lay on the table before him, and examined it.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I see that you have the title of captain, but that, I presume, means a captain in the merchant service."

"I am in the Chilian merchant service now, but I was once lieutenant in the English navy."

The statement aroused his interest.

"You must have left it very young!" he said, looking at me keenly.

"I was court-martialled and cashiered for striking my superior officer."

Lord Cochrane raised his eyebrows and was silent for a space. At length he said,

"Your name seems familiar to me. Did not you once capture a prize with a single boat's crew, ignoring the recall of the officer in command of the attack?"

"That incident, my lord, was at the root of the ill-feeling which led to my final act of insubordination."

"Discipline is everything, Captain Wildash," rejoined Lord Cochrane, "though in my younger days," he added with a smile, "I must confess to having been guilty of a somewhat similar offence. But, to return to the object of your visit, I am sorry to have to tell you that all the commissions have already been conferred."

The announcement was a great disappointment to me, and I saw that my only hope of retrieving my position was taken from me. I suppose my face gave expression to my feelings, for Lord Cochrane went on in kindly tones :

"I should be doing you a poor service to let you entertain any groundless expectations. All the captains have been appointed, and they have the power to select their officers. I could not force a captain to take a man whom he did not wish to have."

The interview was evidently at an end. I rose from my seat.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I am much indebted to your lordship for the kindness you have shown me," I said.

Lord Cochrane held out his hand.

"If I can do anything for you, I will. There are not many men in Chile who have had the advantage of a training in the English navy."

The next few days passed miserably enough for me, faint flickerings of hope alternating with complete despair. At length, a week later, as I was walking along the quay, watching with an envious heart the bustle and excitement caused by the approaching expedition, Rodrigo, who, as my servant, had taken up his quarters at the "Fonda del Héspero," came from there with a letter in his hand. It was an official envelope franked by government, and I opened it with a wild rush of hope that I was unable to control.

The letter ran as follows :

"To CAPTAIN WILDASH.

"Dear Sir.—My flag-lieutenant on board the *O'Higgins* has had an accident, and lies in hospital. As there is no chance of his being able to join the ship by the time the fleet sails, I offer you the appointment. If you are willing to accept it, come and see me at my house.
COCHRANE."

Needless to say, I was delighted with my piece of good-luck, and lost no time in repairing to Lord Cochrane's residence. As soon as he heard that I was ready to accept the post, he set me to work to help him, for there was much to do. Chilian ideas of equipping a fleet were very different to English, and as the government, from improvidence or greed, were grudging with the money, it was with difficulty that we secured even the most common necessities.

The two weeks that followed were busy ones for me, but I understood the work, and was glad to be back

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

again in my old profession. The days sped by, and my last evening at the "Fonda del Héspero" arrived.

The fleet was to sail on the following day, and Rodrigo, who was going on board the *O'Higgins* as my servant, with some light general duties to do as well, had already taken most of my baggage off to the ship. I sat in my favorite corner over a bottle of wine with Antonio, who seemed to feel genuine regret at my departure.

"Well, señor!" he said, as he raised his glass to drink my health, "you have succeeded in obtaining the appointment you desired, and I therefore give you my felicitations on the event. For my part, I could never sleep at night on board a ship of war for thinking of the enemy's round ball which might cut me in two the following morning."

I laughed at this frank avowal of his distaste for naval warfare.

"When once you get into action, Antonio," I said, "the excitement makes you forget the danger."

Antonio shook his head and drained his glass to fortify himself against the thoughts of such unpleasant eventualities.

"I am a peaceful citizen, señor," he replied, "and am willing to let those who enjoy it run the risk of broken heads. All I need is enough to eat and drink and pay my debts. If I get this, those who will may get the glory."

"Every man to his own trade, Antonio," I answered.

Then, willing to change the subject, I continued, "What news of Don Luis? I have been too busy to inquire after him of late."

"He is almost recovered, and was out to-day for a short time on the quay, leaning on Señorita Montenar's arm. I think she has won his heart by nursing him so tenderly."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

It was natural enough, and no doubt his affection was reciprocated. Don Luis was a good-looking young fellow, with a graceful manner, such as ladies love. Then, too, an invalid is always sure of a woman's sympathy.

"And what of his political opinions?" I asked.

"He is more than ever a partisan of Spain, señor. They were talking of the war last night, and they asked me about you."

"What did they say?"

"Señora Montenar began it. She said, 'Tell me, Antonio, is it true that the Englishman you have in the house is flag-lieutenant on the *O'Higgins*?"

"I told her that it was so.

"'When does the fleet sail?' she asked.

"'The day after to-morrow, señora,' I replied.

"'Are they well fitted out, and confident of success?'

"'They are both, señora,' I rejoined.

"She was silent for a moment, pondering my answer. Then she said, 'I fear Lord Cochrane. They say that there is nothing that he will not do or dare. With the aid of his flag-lieutenant, he will be capable of any act of treachery.'

"Here the señorita spoke for the first time.

"'I do not think, mother,' she said, 'that you can accuse Señor Wildash of treachery, however unscrupulous he may be.'

"'See how unfairly he provoked Don Luis!' returned her mother.

"'No, cousin,' interposed Don Luis, 'there was no unfairness on his part, and I hope to repay him in an equally straightforward manner!'

"'Let bygones be bygones, Luis!' said the señorita, laying her hand upon his arm. 'Señor Wildash, when with the fleet, will carry his life in his hands, and there

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

will be no cause for you to harbor any thoughts of revenge.'

"And that is all I heard, señor!" Antonio concluded, "for at that point I was called below."

Our talk then turned on other topics, and it was not long before we parted for the night. The conversation, however, which Antonio narrated kept returning to my thoughts, and I experienced a certain satisfaction in remembering that, of whatever other crimes the señorita deemed me capable, treachery was not one of them.

CHAPTER IV

I WAS on board the *O'Higgins* early on the following morning making ready for the admiral's arrival. We had by this time got everything ship-shape, and although the smartness of a British battle-ship could not be expected on a Chilian frigate, the crew had at least been drilled to understand their work.

Lord Cochrane was expected to join the ship at noon, and some two hours earlier people began to collect on the landing-stage and quays to witness his departure. Punctually at the hour, the cheers of the crowd showed that he had made his appearance, and shortly after the gig of the *O'Higgins*, which had been waiting for him at the landing-stage, put off from the shore.

On reaching the ship Lord Cochrane took the captain into his cabin, and I was expecting to receive orders to hoist the signal for weighing anchor, when I was summoned to the admiral. I found Lord Cochrane and the captain looking through the charts, and when I was announced the former said to me :

"I find, Wildash, that I have left behind me on shore a chart which I particularly want. The number is 168. Will you please to get it for me? You will probably find it among the other charts on the side table in my room."

I reached deck just in time to stop the gig from being hauled on board, and the crew, soon taking their places again, pulled off vigorously for the shore. The crowd still filled the landing-stage, but I pushed my way through, and, hiring a carriage, drove off for Lord Coch-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rane's house. I was accustomed to pass in and out of it as I wished, so, when the carriage stopped at the entrance, I descended and walked straight up to Lord Cochrane's room. As I turned over the charts on the table of which the admiral had spoken, his eldest son, a fair-haired, bright-cheeked little boy of five years of age, came running in.

"Do you come from father?" he asked.

"Yes, my boy," I answered. "I am straight from the *O'Higgins*."

"And are you going back again?"

"As soon as I have found what I am looking for."

"Let me go with you?" he said, coaxingly, taking one of my hands in his.

"Wait till I am ready, then," I replied, in jest, and went on with my search. In a few minutes I was fortunate enough to find the missing chart, and hurried back to the carriage. Much to my surprise, I found my late companion seated in it, quietly awaiting my arrival. I had not expected my words to be taken so literally, and said :

"Come, my little man, you must jump out; I have no time to lose."

"But you promised to take me to father!" he answered, in reproachful tones, not offering to move.

At this moment his nurse, who had only just missed him, came hurrying to the carriage, and called him to her. But both her threats and entreaties passed unheeded, and, as precious time was being lost, I bade her get in and then they could return together.

But when I reached the landing-stage, I found I had as determined a will to deal with in the son as in the father. He would listen neither to his nurse nor to myself, and as he would not leave me, I put him on my shoulders to carry him through the crowd, intending

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to let the final decision of the matter rest with Lord Cochrane.

Perched above the heads of the surrounding mass of people, he was soon recognized as the admiral's son and greeted with enthusiastic cheers. The demonstration delighted him immensely, and, taking off his cap, he cried, in his piping, boyish treble, the only Spanish words he knew, "*Viva la Patria!*"

This action redoubled the enthusiasm of the crowd, and won for the little fellow a more rapturous reception than had been accorded to the admiral himself.

Gaining the gig with difficulty, I put him by my side in the stern, and then, engaging a shore-boat in which the nurse could follow and take back her charge, I put off for the ship.

My young companion was recognized by the sailors while still some distance from the *O'Higgins*, and they crowded to the side to welcome him. The cheers which they gave him as he stepped on deck no doubt attracted Lord Cochrane's attention, for as we were passing aft towards his cabin he and the captain made their appearance. The admiral was evidently very astonished to see his son, but the little fellow ran up to him, and, putting his arms round his legs, said that he had come to live on board with him.

"He would not leave me, your lordship," I explained, as I gave him the chart for which I had been sent, "so I brought his nurse in a shore-boat to take him home again."

At this moment the nurse appeared on deck, but when he saw her the child only clung more tightly to his father, pleading eagerly to be allowed to stay.

"He wishes to enter the profession at an early age," remarked Lord Cochrane to the captain, with a smile. "Well, he shall have his way. Tell her ladyship," he

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

continued, turning to the nurse, "that Master Tom is going to accompany the fleet."

The decision was a popular one, for when the men saw that the nurse was leaving the ship without her charge they broke out into a still more hearty round of cheers. The signal for weighing anchor was soon run up, and in half an hour the *O'Higgins* was leading the small fleet out of the bay, in full sight of the vast crowds on shore which had assembled to witness its departure. The voyage was made in easy stages, and it was not till three or four weeks later that we drew near to Callao, where the Spanish fleet was lying. Lord Cochrane's plan was to make an attack during the carnival, but a sea-fog springing up, as the *O'Higgins* and *San Martin* were leading the way, the latter ship drifted out of her course, and the design had to be abandoned. The presence of the sea-fog, however—a very common feature of the coast at that time of the year—gave the admiral the idea of making use of it to cover an attack. A few days later the opportunity occurred, and the *O'Higgins* and *Lautaro* were chosen to make the attempt.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when we weighed anchor from our position off the island of San Lorenzo, and set on in a northeasterly direction, in order to clear the sand-bank to the north of the island before turning to enter Callao Bay. The flagship took the lead, the *Lautaro* following closely in her wake, so as to avoid the mistake which frustrated the first attempt. There was just enough breeze from the southwest to carry the vessels slowly through the water, but the fog was so dense that, although they were barely half a cable's length apart, the bows of the *Lautaro* could only just be seen from the quarter-deck of the *O'Higgins*.

It was a difficult piece of navigation. As the land could not be seen, the point at which to alter the course

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

could only be calculated by the distance travelled and the soundings obtained. An error in these particulars might put the ships ashore at any moment. No trace of anxiety, however, could be discerned in Lord Cochrane's face, and he paced the quarter-deck with a quiet, resolute air, glancing now and again at a chart upon the chart-table. When the soundings gave the depth of the required position, and the distance run, as calculated from the log, coincided with the same, Lord Cochrane issued the order, and we stood in for the harbor on the starboard tack. If our calculations were right, this course would take us straight to the anchorage of the Spanish warships. If we had made a mistake, we might find ourselves aground, or immediately beneath the guns of the forts.

The decks had been cleared for action, and every man was at his post, when little Tom Cochrane made his appearance from below, arrayed in a miniature midshipman's uniform, which the sailors had cut out for him. He was wearing it for the first time, and it was ludicrous to see his air of importance and the grave way in which he acknowledged the salutes of the men. Lord Cochrane stood watching him for some time with evident amusement, then, realizing the danger of allowing him on deck at such a time, he went and led him, amid much urgent protestation on the child's part, back to the cabin.

"I have locked him in the after-cabin," he said to me, almost regretfully, when he returned to the quarter-deck. "He begged hard to be allowed to stay, but it would not do, of course."

It was now half-past eleven, and at any moment a Spanish warship might loom suddenly out of the mist ahead of us, or we find ourselves aground beneath the forts. The captain suggested taking in sail and lessening speed, but Lord Cochrane told him to let her travel

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

as before. There was absolute silence on deck, a silence which seemed intensified by the surrounding mist. My senses, strained to the utmost by the nervous tension of going, as it were, blindfold into action, were alive to the smallest details, and I could hear distinctly the rippling of the water against the ship's side, and the splashing of the sea-lions—with which the coast abounds—on the surface of the bay.

It could not have been more than ten minutes later, when, without the slightest warning, the *O'Higgins* shot out of the mist into a bright, clear atmosphere, illumined by the noon tide sun. The Spanish warships were not yet within range of our guns, but so accurately had our navigation been conducted that they lay directly in the course which we were taking. It was annoying thus to lose all chance of a surprise, but Lord Cochrane determined to hold on, and in the broad daylight lay his ships alongside the Spanish frigates *Esmeralda* and *Verganza*.

The fates, however, were once more against us. After we had run nearly half the distance, and were well within the range of fire from the forts as well as from the shipping, the wind suddenly fell, and took away all hope of getting to close quarters with the enemy. Worse still, it was impossible to withdraw, so Lord Cochrane, after clewing up the sails, and anchoring with springs on the cable, set about returning the fire which was pouring upon us.

The *O'Higgins* and *Lautaro* had been so manœuvred that one or two of the enemy's vessels lay between them and the forts, so that the latter were somewhat hampered in their action. But our position was unpleasantly exposed, and we gave most of our attention to the forts, on account of the heavier guns with which they were provided. After the fight had lasted an hour, the *Lautaro*

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

signalled that her captain was badly wounded, and then the first lieutenant, who succeeded to the command, allowed the ship, either intentionally or through bad management, to drift out of the range of the enemy's guns. The *O'Higgins* was thus exposed to the whole force of their fire, and, thinking that the *Lautaro* had been disabled, they redoubled the vigor of their cannonade.

It was on such occasions that Lord Cochrane was seen to the best advantage. He ordered the gunners to fire only at the nearest fort, and, obeying his instructions, it was not long before they silenced it. The other forts, however, maintained their fire as briskly as ever, and one or two of the officers on board the *O'Higgins* began to think it was time to make an attempt to withdraw.

This was not the opinion of the commander-in-chief. Seated comfortably astride the bulwarks on the quarter-deck—his favorite position when in action—he watched the progress of the fight with as much composure as if he were merely witnessing a little target practice. His quickness to detect the direction of the enemy's shot, and to decide the point at which it would strike his ship, was nothing short of marvellous. I was standing close to where he sat, and during one of the most vigorous outbursts of fire against us, he said to me: "There comes a shot for us, Wildash! But don't move, for it will strike below us!" A fraction of a second later the ball pierced the ship's side immediately beneath our feet.

It was shortly after this that we were both considerably astonished to see young Tom Cochrane again on deck. He had escaped from his confinement, as we afterwards discovered, by the quarter-galley window, and, quite undismayed by the thunder of the guns, was now engaged in handing powder to the men, and performing other little offices. Lord Cochrane was watching the brave little fellow with pardonable pride, and hesitating

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to replace him in confinement, when a cannon-ball struck a sailor near to whom his son was standing, the concussion of the air knocking down the child as well. But Tom recovered his feet in an instant, and, seeing his father's horror-stricken face, ran up to him, crying : "The shot did not touch me, father ! Indeed, I am not hurt."

Lord Cochrane, not perhaps uninfluenced by this incident, soon afterwards came to the conclusion that he had sufficiently exposed his ship, and satisfied with a demonstration which had succeeded in silencing one of the forts, took advantage of a breeze which sprang up to retire from action. Considering the length of time during which the *O'Higgins* was under fire, her losses were very small, and the commander-in-chief was confident that on a future occasion, with a favorable wind, he would be able to attack the enemy's fleet with complete success.

The following morning, however, we found that our action of the previous day had so disheartened the Spaniards that they were dismantling their war vessels of their yards and topmasts, and forming a double boom as a protection to their anchorage. Seeing that with this obstruction it would be impossible to enter the harbor again, Lord Cochrane took possession of the island of San Lorenzo, and set up a workshop for the manufacture of bombs and the fitting-out of fireships with which to destroy it.

These operations proved very tedious, and wasted a good deal of valuable time. There were no proper appliances for the work, nor any mechanic who was skilled in it.

Major Miller, a dashing English officer in command of the marines, was the first to take charge of the workshop, but in an explosion caused by the carelessness of

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

one of the men employed in it, he was so seriously injured that six weeks elapsed before he was able to resume his duties. At length, however, the work began to progress more satisfactorily, and I was looking forward to a decisive assault upon the enemy's position, when, late one afternoon, Lord Cochrane sent for me to his cabin.

"Are you ready to sail within the next hour, Wildash?" he asked, as soon as I entered.

"Within the next five minutes, if you wish it, my lord!" I replied, wondering what project he had in mind.

He smiled at my answer and went on :

"I have received information from a reliable source that a large amount of treasure is being sent by the Spaniards from Lima to Guambuco. It left Lima yesterday and should be somewhere near Supé to-night. I want you to take command of the *Chacabuco*, with fifty marines in addition to the crew, and, landing at Supé, to intercept it."

The captain of the *Chacabuco* had been transferred to the *Lautaro* when the captain of the latter was wounded in the attack upon the Spanish fleet, and the vacancy thus made had been only temporarily filled. I was very pleased both with the appointment and the mission.

"I will do my best to capture the treasure, my lord," I answered, "if I am fortunate enough to fall in with it."

"Very good, Wildash; here is your commission," handing me the papers. "Go on board the *Chacabuco* at once and take command. As soon as it is dark set sail for Supé."

CHAPTER V

It is no sign that fortune intends to be kind to a man when she smiles upon him at the commencement of a work or an enterprise which he has undertaken. So far from the beginning being half the battle, it is often the most unimportant portion of the contest. Preliminary failure is indeed at times the only stepping-stone to ultimate success, and that Italian general was the phraser of no empty paradox when he said that the reason why he was so uniformly victorious in his battles as an old man was because he had been so consistently beaten as a young man.

Thus, in the case of my first command as captain of a ship of war, things seemed to go almost ominously well for me. Setting sail from Callao as soon as it was dark, I reached Supé about one o'clock on the following morning. The landing through the surf with the marines was effected without mishap, and as soon as I set foot on shore I heard that the convoy in charge of the treasure had just passed through the village on their way to Guambuco. Unencumbered as we were, it was an easy matter to make a détour and lay in ambush for them, a plan which was carried out so happily that the treasure fell into our hands without the loss of a single man. By ten o'clock the same morning we had embarked the whole of the prize, and that evening I was able to report to Lord Cochrane in person the success of the mission with which he had intrusted me.

The manner in which I had conducted this expedi-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

tion was considered so satisfactory that the admiral was pleased to confirm me in the command of the *Chacabuco*, and to give me a roving commission to harass the coast towns still in possession of the Spaniards, capturing treasure on sea or land, as opportunity arose. The appointment afforded me the greatest satisfaction. I was sorry, of course, to leave the fleet just when Lord Cochrane was maturing his plan of attack on Callao harbor, which I felt sure would be crowned with success. I could have wished, also, to have been given the command of a more serviceable ship. The *Chacabuco* was an old coasting brig converted into a war vessel, and carrying only twenty guns. She was a slow sailer, and had little chance of escape if she fell in with a Spanish frigate. Her spars and sails had seen long service, and the stores from which to replenish them were wofully deficient. In spite of these drawbacks, however, I counted myself very lucky to obtain the command of a ship sent on an independent mission, in which I should be practically my own master.

After several days spent in putting the *Chacabuco* in as good repair as possible, I set out from Callao with provisions for a three months' cruise. My good-luck still followed me. Lord Cochrane had obtained information of another convoy, which had left Lima for the south, and this I was lucky enough to intercept and capture. By following the admiral's advice, and working at night whenever possible, I was also able to seize three Spanish merchantmen, each with treasure on board. But these successes, following so closely on each other, possessed no small element of danger for me. The men, eager for their prize-money, began to look upon this run of good-fortune as the natural state of things, and to grow discontented if we passed a week or two without making a capture. In this frame of mind they would

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

entertain the most extravagant designs, the execution of which I had great difficulty in preventing. My first lieutenant supporting their demands on one occasion, I was induced to sanction an adventure which, by the merest good-luck, escaped ending in complete disaster.

Having run into Pisco one afternoon for water, I heard that a barque had just sailed for Arica, a small place to the south of it, to take on board some Spanish treasure. When we had watered we set off in pursuit of her, but on reaching Arica the following morning there was no vessel to be seen. She had either got away successfully with the treasure, or had not yet arrived. We cruised up and down that day and the whole of the following night without sighting a single sail. It seemed as if means had been found to warn the barque of the presence of the *Chacabuco*, and that she was waiting till we had left that part of the coast before making her appearance at Arica.

The thought of all that treasure lying ashore, ready to be shipped as soon as our backs were turned, was tantalizing in the extreme. It worked, indeed, to such an extent upon my imagination that, in spite of the smallness of my force, I began seriously to entertain the project of landing and attacking the well-manned fort on shore. With this intention, I cruised slowly along the coast, trying to find a suitable landing-place other than the one opposite the town, which, of course, could easily be held by a detachment of the garrison. No spot, however, could be discovered adapted for the purpose. The coast-line lay open to the southwest winds, which were blowing strongly at the time. The breakers were tremendous, and it would have been madness to attempt to land. I accordingly anchored for the night, intending to leave on the following morning if the weather did not moderate.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

But on the next day the wind was as strong as ever, and I gave orders to weigh anchor. The men sullenly obeyed, gazing, as they worked the capstan, with covetous eyes at the fort which was supposed to hold the treasure. As soon as it was seen on shore that we were going, the garrison manifested great activity. It seemed as if they were getting the treasure ready for embarkation on the vessel which would arrive on our departure. The crew began to mutter among themselves, and I saw one of them go up and speak to the first lieutenant, who was superintending the work of weighing anchor. After conversing together for a short time, the officer approached me and said :

"One of the sailors tells me, señor, that he knows of a good landing-place about two miles and a half to the south of the town. Would you allow me to inspect the spot?"

I saw no objection to his proposal, and when the anchor was up we dropped down to the place of which the sailor spoke. From what I could see through my glass—for there was not enough water to take the *Chacabuco* near to it—it was a little cove surrounded by high cliffs. I ordered a boat to be lowered and manned, and the first lieutenant, with the sailor who had spoken of the place, put off for the shore.

In three-quarters of an hour the boat returned, and the first lieutenant reporting that the landing was quite practicable, I at length reluctantly gave way to the evident wishes of himself and of the crew. In order, however, to avert the suspicions of the enemy, I continued, under light canvas, my southerly course, and did not turn back till after sunset.

With the aid of the strong southwest wind and a full spread of sail, the *Chacabuco* was off the little cove again at eleven o'clock that night. Two boats, large enough

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to carry twenty-five marines in each, were lowered and manned. I put off in the first one, Rodrigo accompanying me, as usual, while the sailor who was acquainted with the landing-place took the tiller. The second boat was in charge of the first lieutenant. It was a bright moonlight night, and if any of the Spanish garrison had mounted the "Morro," or lofty cliff to the south of Arica, they could have seen us without difficulty. But for the purpose of landing the moon was a distinct advantage. The wind had fallen slightly, but the big rollers which swept beneath us warned us of the size of the breakers through which we should have to pass to effect a landing.

The sailor at the tiller, however, showed no lack of confidence. As we neared the shore the little cove opened out, and he pointed out to me a narrow passage between two rocks leading to a small basin, where, he declared, we could land in perfect safety. The line where the rollers broke was about fifty yards outside this passage, and when nearing it the coxswain stopped the boat in order to choose the most favorable moment for attempting to pass it. Several small swells passed beneath us, and then a dark shadow rose up astern of us; we were lifted high into the air and dropped as suddenly. "Give way!" cried the coxswain, and the oarsmen pulled hard to pass the dangerous part before the next roller overtook us. It was a hard struggle, but they won the race, and on the wash of a spent breaker we shot through the narrow passage between the rocks. The little inlet seemed suitable in all respects, and the coxswain was taking advantage of the wash of a second breaker to carry us ashore, when there was a tremendous crash, and with all my companions I was thrown headlong into the water. The boat had been driven on to a sunken rock and completely overturned.

How I managed to get ashore I do not know, but on

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

reaching it I remember Rodrigo's faithful hand helping me to clamber on to a ledge of rock. We set to work assisting others out of the water, and at last all were brought safe to land except the poor fellow who steered us, and who was never seen again. As for the boat, she was observed floating for a minute or two upsidedown with a large hole in her bottom, but she soon broke up and disappeared. The second boat witnessed our disaster in good time and waited outside the breakers till we could indicate to them a safer landing-place.

For this we at once began to search. A broken series of ledges ran along on either side of the inlet where we had landed, and precipitous cliffs rose from the rear of the beach. I examined the whole distance to which these ledges extended, and found no spot where it would be possible to land from a boat. The gravity of our situation began to dawn upon me. Nearly all the muskets had been lost in the capsizing of the boat, and those which were saved were rendered useless on account of the powder being wet. How could I think of attacking the fort with no firearms and only half my men? On the other hand, we could not get off to the ship, and if we stayed where we were, the enemy would discover us at dawn and effect an easy capture. Bitterly did I regret having trusted to the first lieutenant's report, instead of having carefully examined the landing-place myself.

Some action, however, must be taken, and I soon made up my mind. Hopeless as it appeared, I determined to attack the fort. It was now one o'clock in the morning, and the moon would be down in another hour. The fact that we had no firearms was, after all, of no great importance in a surprise of the kind I contemplated. Our numbers, including the sailors who rowed the boat, were thirty-five, all told, and every man carried a cutlass. It was an absurdly small force with which to attack a gar-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rison at least one hundred and fifty strong, but I had no choice.

Calling my men together, I told them of my determination, and they expressed their willingness to follow me wherever I should lead them. I then hailed the first lieutenant, and told him to return to the ship, weighing anchor for Arica as soon as the moon went down. My next care was to find a path out over the cliffs, for there was no exit either way along the beach, as the ledges came to an abrupt termination, and the waves dashed against sheer rocks. I distributed the men over the whole length of the position, telling any one who found an outlet to call out to the others. Then, summoning Rodrigo, I commenced to ascend with him the cliffs immediately behind where we stood.

The first part of the ascent was easy enough, but when we had climbed about half-way up the face of the cliff became steeper, till farther progress was stopped by an almost perpendicular wall. I tried two other places on either side with equal ill success. The same abrupt wall brought me to a standstill in both cases. The other parts of the position seemed equally impracticable, for no one had announced the discovery of an exit. I went along the whole line myself, being met everywhere with the report that no spot could be found where the cliffs could be scaled. In another quarter of an hour the moon would go down, leaving us small hope of escaping from our prison. There was no means of communicating with the ship, even supposing she could have given us assistance, and it seemed as if we were destined to remain where we were till daylight discovered our presence to the enemy, when a detachment of soldiers would be sent to shoot us down like rats in a trap.

I racked my brains in vain to devise some means of escape from our position. Would it be possible to cut

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

steps in the face of the almost perpendicular wall? I tried to do so with a cutlass, but the stone was hard and the cutlass broke. As a last resource, I was contemplating the advisability of swimming or wading along at the foot of the cliffs till a shelving beach was once more gained, when Rodrigo made his appearance, carrying three oars.

"What do you want with those, Rodrigo?" I asked.

"They are the only ones washed ashore from the boat, señor," he answered; "but if they are lashed together one after the other, they will be long enough, I think, to reach the top of the cliff."

Rodrigo proceeded to carry out his idea. The three oars were firmly lashed together with some spun-yarn which, sailor-like, he carried in his pocket, and then he took them to a fairly level ledge which we found at the foot of the steep wall. When reared on end, the blade of the highest one just reached to the top of the cliff. The ledge on which we stood only admitted of one man on either side to steady the oars. It required a good nerve to attempt to climb so unstable a structure, for a fall would mean a broken neck; but Rodrigo possessed the necessary resolution, and volunteered to make the ascent.

With a sailor steadyng the oars on one side and myself on the other, Rodrigo began his task. The first oar was easily climbed, but when he reached the second, the structure began to bend and sway beneath his weight, and we had great difficulty in keeping it upright. On gaining the third oar, the boatswain stopped to take a rest. Not a word was spoken by the men as they watched him from below, but there was a smothered exclamation when he began the last stage of his journey. As he advanced the oar grated ominously against the side of the cliff, and the swaying recommenced with greater vio-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

lence than before. Once the blade of the topmost oar came away altogether from the cliff, and the impromptu ladder seemed about to fall backward into the sea. Once the structure slipped towards the right, and was with the utmost difficulty stopped in its career. At length, however, Rodrigo's steady nerve won him the victory, and he gained the top of the cliff.

With some one to steady the oars at the top, the ascent was rendered much more easy, and the eight sailors who followed soon joined Rodrigo. But the marines were not such expert climbers, and would still have been as far as ever from effecting their escape, had not one of their number found a piece of rope which had been washed ashore from the boat. One end of the rope was tied round a man's chest beneath the arms, and the other end being thrown to the sailors on the top of the cliff, they assisted him to ascend the oars. In this way all of the marines were hauled up the cliff without mishap. I was the last to ascend, and received no injury beyond cutting my knuckles against the sharp edges of projecting pieces of rock.

The moon had gone down by the time we all gained the summit, and we set out in the dark along the cliffs in the direction of Arica. It was an ascent the whole way to the high hill overlooking the town, and, with our wet clothes clinging to our bodies, we found the marching heavy work. Moreover, the rough character of the ground over which we had to pass, encumbered as it was with boulders and loose stones, impeded our progress, while the darkness made it difficult to pick our way. It was almost half-past three before we reached the top of the Morro.

Here I halted the men and went on by myself to reconnoitre. Descending the steep hill, I found that the fort lay about a couple of hundred yards from the foot of it,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

and on the outskirts of the town. It was a large, square building, with walls fifteen feet in height all round it. Without scaling-ladders they could not be surmounted, and the only means of effecting an entrance would be by the gate, which lay on the side away from the hill. I crept cautiously round to take a look at it, with little hope of benefiting by the inspection.

My surprise and satisfaction was, then, considerable on finding that this gate stood open, while soldiers passed to and fro unarmed, with sacks upon their backs, containing, in all probability, the treasure of which we were in search. It was plain that my ruse had succeeded. Believing the *Chacabuco* had sailed away for the south, they were taking the money down to the beach to put on board the barque, which had no doubt been informed of our departure.

I withdrew noiselessly from my post of observation, and rejoined my men. I explained to them that the success of the enterprise depended on our presence being concealed till we were within striking distance of the fort gate. For this purpose it would be necessary to march in single file, allowing sufficient distance between the men to take advantage of each small point of cover.

The utmost care was to be taken to avoid making any noise, and cutlasses were to be carried in the hand ready for immediate action. The men, chilled to the bone by waiting in their wet clothes in the strong wind at the top of the Morro, were glad to be relieved of their inaction, and followed me with willing hearts.

At the bottom of the hill I took advantage of an old, crumbling boundary wall to conceal us from the fort till we reached the back of the houses on the southern side of the road running from the fort to the beach. At this point I turned sharply to the right in the direction

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of the fort gate. I had crept to within eighty yards of the fort, when I found that an opening lay between the last two houses on our side of the road. Through this opening, which was at least thirty feet wide, I could see the soldiers passing down the road laden with money-bags, while the non-commissioned officers superintended the operation, with torches in their hands, to make certain that none of the treasure was lost during transit. A sergeant now halted at this opening, and with his back to us kept an eye on the men as they passed.

I watched this man from the shelter of the wall of the last house but one, hoping that he would soon move on, and that I should be able to collect the whole of my force at the back of the last house, before making a rush for the fort gate. If I attempted to do so from my present position the alarm might be raised before we could get near enough to prevent the gate being closed against us. It was necessary, therefore, to have a little patience, and I remained motionless at my post of observation, looking at the line of laden soldiers marching to the beach, and of empty-handed soldiers returning to the fort. The sergeant's shadow, thrown by his torch on the side of the opposite house, danced grotesquely as he cursed his men with Spanish vigor of gesticulation.

After waiting twenty minutes in vain for this sergeant to withdraw, I could bear the tension of the watch no longer. Besides, the stream of laden soldiers might cease at any moment, and then the whole garrison would be free to resist our attack upon the fort. The patience of my men, too, had been severely taxed. They tried in vain to check the coughing to which their damp clothes, fanned by the cool night wind, made them liable, and I was in constant fear that a sneeze would reveal our presence to the enemy. Once, indeed, a cutlass fell with a sharp ring upon the ground, and the sergeant

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

swung round quickly, peering in our direction with his torch above his head. But he could see nothing, and, thinking his ears had deceived him, he gave his attention once more to his men.

This was my opportunity. Sending the word along that each man was to follow separately, using his own discretion as to the best time to cross, I stepped quickly over to the shelter of the last house before the fort. Rodrigo followed, and then one by one the men joined us, the sergeant not once turning his head, though had he done so the passing figure could not have failed to catch his eye.

From our new position we could see the gate distinctly, and the sentinel on guard leaning idly against the portal. As I looked, the line of laden men came to an end, the last one soon afterwards passing the house behind which we were concealed. Now was the time for action.

Calling on my men to follow me, I rushed out from the shelter of the house. About fifty yards separated us from the gate, and for quite half this distance I was unnoticed, for there was no sergeant here with a torch, and the soldiers returning to the fort had their backs to me. The sentinel was still leaning against one side of the gateway, the butt end of his musket resting on the ground. If I could only cover the remaining twenty-five yards before I was discovered, all would be well.

It was, of course, impossible. One of the soldiers whom I had passed raised the alarm, and those in front of me turned round to see what was the matter. Two of them, on seeing me, although they were unarmed, attempted to stop me, but a couple of strokes from my sword rendered them incapable of doing so. The sentinel, suddenly roused from his torpor, lost his presence of mind, and stared at me stupidly, without attempting at first to use his musket. But when I was only a few

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

yards from him, he raised it hurriedly and fired, after which he ran back to close the gate. The ball grazed my head and the powder singed my hair, but I was in time to prevent his purpose. My sword struck him to the ground, and the entrance to the fort was ours.

The guard now came tumbling out of their quarters near the gate, and two or three of them discharged their muskets at us. They were, however, quickly overpowered, having only succeeded in wounding slightly one of my marines. Leaving half a dozen men to hold the gate, I proceeded to take possession of the rest of the fort. So quickly had everything been done, and so completely was the garrison taken by surprise, that we met with little serious opposition. A few shots were fired at us by isolated men, and some officers made a short stand against us with their pistols, but within ten minutes from the time I entered the gate all real resistance had been overcome.

My chief care now was to make certain of the treasure. Supplying my men with muskets and ammunition from the guard-room, I left Rodrigo with half my force in command of the fort, and with the rest set out along the road to the beach. The unarmed men whom we had shut out of the fort had disappeared, but on reaching the beach I was received with a volley from a detachment which had evidently been left in charge of the treasure. It was fortunate that I had been able to arm my men with muskets, for a cutlass is useless against a bayonet. As it was, I gave the order to fire, and then with fixed bayonets charged down upon the guard, who turned and fled when we were within twenty yards of their position. In this way the whole treasure fell into our hands.

Fortune favored us again on the following morning. The wind had dropped to such an extent that boats could

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

easily be landed, and the work of embarking the money was effected without mishap. It was impossible, of course, to leave a sufficient garrison in the fort to hold it against the reinforcements which the enemy might reasonably be expected to send, so I contented myself with spiking the guns and blowing up the powder magazine. I then put off to the ship with my men, just in time to avoid being attacked by a large Spanish force, which had arrived, as I afterwards heard, from Tacna.

My good-luck did not end there. As we were weighing anchor I caught sight of a sail to the northward of us. Flying the Spanish flag as a precaution, I headed straight for the vessel, and soon found her to be a barque carrying the Spanish colors. She was evidently the one intended for the treasure, and her arrival was consequent on receiving information that we had sailed for the south. The unsuspecting captain, taking the *Chacabuco* for a Spanish warship, sailed innocently towards us, when we ran up the Chilian colors and made an easy capture.

CHAPTER VI

TOWARDS the end of my three months' cruise I found myself within a short distance of Valparaiso, and as I was in need of water and provisions I determined to run in there before returning to Callao. On entering the harbor, however, I was considerably surprised to find the Chilian fleet assembled there. My first duty, of course, was to report myself to the admiral, and as soon as I had anchored I put off in a boat to the *O'Higgins*.

On reaching the flag-ship I was told by the officer on watch, a young Englishman, who had been my junior on board when I was flag-lieutenant, that Lord Cochrane had taken up his residence on shore during the time that the fleet remained in harbor. As there was no immediate necessity to seek him in his house, I accepted the young officer's invitation to exchange our news over a glass of wine. I soon learned how the fleet had fared during my absence. The rockets made in the extemporized laboratory on the island of San Lorenzo had not proved satisfactory, a trial with them and the fire-ships ending unsuccessfully. As nothing could be done against the Spanish fleet in Callao without weapons of that character, Lord Cochrane had determined to return to Valparaiso and superintend their manufacture. An English expert engineer had been engaged to make the rockets, and the admiral had in view the preparing of explosion ships, such as those with which he rendered helpless the French fleet in the Aix roads.

After I had satisfied the young officer with a short ac-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

count of my cruise in the *Chacabuco*, I put off for the shore. I reached the admiral's house just as Lady Cochrane and her son were issuing from it. Tom ran to me at once, crying, "Here is Lieutenant Wildash!" and Lady Cochrane held out her hand with a pleasant smile.

"I suppose I must forgive you, Mr. Wildash," she said, "for having robbed me of my boy, now that he has come back safely, and you have been doing such great things, but I shall not trust him with you again."

"I own, madam, that I ought not to have taken him, but he made the best of his opportunity, and distinguished himself in action."

Lady Cochrane gazed fondly at him.

"He is following early in his father's footsteps," she returned. "But you wish to see the admiral? If you go in at once you will find him disengaged."

I entered the house, and the man-servant conducted me to Lord Cochrane's room. The admiral, who was seated at his desk when I entered, rose and welcomed me with a hearty handshake.

"I heard that the *Chacabuco* had been sighted," he said, "and knew that I should soon receive a visit from you. I congratulate you on the results of your cruise. The Chilian government," he added, with a slight smile, "should be much indebted to you."

I understood the significance of his smile. Before the fleet had sailed for Callao, the government had made lavish promises of the handsome share of prize-money which would be allotted to the officers and crew. In the intervening time a good number of ships and a large amount of treasure had been captured and sent to Valparaiso, but, as I had just heard from the officer on board the flag-ship, the captors' share in the value realized was not forthcoming.

"I trust I have done my duty, my lord!" I answered.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I am sure of it," replied the admiral ; "and I hope you found the work to your taste. It must have been preferable, at any rate, to lying off Callao, waiting for an enemy that did not dare to move."

I made no answer, and Lord Cochrane, to whom this recollection did not seem agreeable, rose and paced the room impatiently. Presently he stopped in front of me and said :

"Next time, I think, the rockets will be more successful, and I shall also try what explosion ships will do. I only wish that everything was ready, and that I could sail for Callao again to-morrow."

"I hope to accompany your lordship," I observed.

Lord Cochrane looked at me, and then resumed his promenade. Apparently he was engaged in considering the wish I had expressed, for at length he said :

"No, no, Wildash ; you have done too well at your cruising work in the *Chacabuco* to be transferred from it. A prize sent in to Valparaiso every now and then puts the government in a good-humor. Is your ship in sound condition?"

"She wants a good deal of overhauling, and the crew, what with casualties and manning the prizes, is very much reduced in numbers."

"She must be refitted, then, and her crew made up again. When everything is ready you will set out on a cruise, this time along the coast to the south of Valparaiso."

Although I should have liked to be present at the second attack on Callao, an independent mission on the *Chacabuco* was of course to be preferred, and I expressed my satisfaction at my reappointment. After some further general conversation, seeing that Lord Cochrane had plenty of work before him on his desk, I took my leave and withdrew.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

My next visit was to the "Fonda del Héspero." Antonio welcomed me in his usual hearty manner, and insisted before anything else on bringing me some wine. When I was served, and Antonio had accepted my invitation to sit down and have a glass with me, I asked after Don Luis Martinez. Antonio said that he had completely recovered from his wound a week or two after my departure in the fleet.

"Is he still with you?" I inquired.

"No, señor, he returned to his father's house soon after Señora Montenar and her daughter left me."

I wondered if the ladies were as active as ever in the cause of Spain, or whether they had begun to see that she was sure to be defeated in the end.

"Did they go back to Santiago?" I asked.

"I believe so, señor. When they left me, they had taken seats in the Santiago coach."

"Don Luis must have missed them," I remarked.

Antonio smiled, and wagged his head knowingly.

"I think, señor, that he was only healed of one wound to fall sick of another, and that his fair cousin took his heart away to Santiago with her."

"Is he still a warm partisan of Spain?"

"I do not know, señor. I have not seen him lately. He left Valparaiso a week or two after the ladies."

He must have followed the señorita to Santiago in order to make his court to her. No doubt he would be successful, and in that case, I wondered how his father would regard the match. But my conversation with Antonio soon took another turn, and the young couple were not again referred to by us.

During the month I now remained at Valparaiso, I had the *Chacabuco* overhauled, and her ammunition and stores replenished as far as I could persuade the niggardly Chilean authorities to do so. With regard to men, although

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I made frequent and urgent application, I could get no more than what I had at the commencement of my former cruise. This number had proved insufficient, but as I saw no chance of obtaining any more I informed Lord Cochrane that the *Chacabuco* was ready to go to sea, and received at once my sailing orders.

I had not been many days on my southern station, which included the coast from Valparaiso to the island of Chiloe, before I realized that my present commission was very different to the former one. The fortress of Valdivia, which was the key to southern Chile, formed the Spanish stronghold on this coast. Considering it practically impregnable, the Spaniards, who still held most of southern Chile, made it their principal port for receiving their reinforcements from Europe. A ship of the meagre armament of the *Chacabuco* could do nothing against the well-appointed frigates which convoyed their merchantmen into this harbor. In fact, on one or two occasions, it was with the greatest difficulty that I avoided capture at their hands. As to expeditions on shore, there was little to be gained by them. The inhabitants, either from sympathy with, or in fear of, the Spaniards, would give us no information, while the Indians, under a lawless mulatto bandit of the name of Benavides, were encouraged by the enemy in every sort of outrage against patriot soldiers and civilians.

In the course of two months' cruising on this coast, I had effected practically nothing. At sea I had managed to capture one or two schooners and other small craft, which fetched only a trifling sum in the prize court at Valparaiso. On land I had destroyed perhaps half a dozen forts, without impairing to an appreciable extent the authority of the Spaniards in the district. I was on the point of returning to Lord Cochrane to ask permission to resume my former cruising-ground to the north

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of Valparaiso, when at dawn one morning the officer on watch reported a sail on the larboard bow. I was out of my cabin in a minute, inspecting the vessel through my glass. She seemed to be a full-rigged Spanish merchantman, and, like the *Chacabuco*, was on a southerly course. I crowded on all sail and hastened in pursuit of her.

We were at this time to the north of Talcahuano, and from the direction taken by the merchantman I concluded that she was making for Valdivia. As the two places were separated by more than a day's run, I had every hope of overtaking her before she reached her destination. By noon I had gained on her considerably, and I was counting the prize as good as won, when another sail appeared on our starboard quarter some distance out to sea. She proved to be a Spanish frigate, and I realized what had happened. She had been convoying the merchantman, but by some mismanagement had become separated from her during the night. My prize was lost to me, and there was every prospect of the *Chacabuco* herself being captured.

I determined, however, to hold on my course. If I could not take the merchantman, I might drive her dangerously near the shore, where she would run the risk of being wrecked. I was to the seaward of her, and as I gained upon her, I forced her to haul in more and more towards the land. We had passed Talcahuano, and were nearing the mouth of the Bio-Bio River, when, regardless of the mud-banks with which it is obstructed, the fugitive turned sharply into it. I could not follow without being caught, as in a trap, by the frigate, so I continued my southerly course, contenting myself with firing a shot at the merchantman as I passed. It struck her in the bows, and the fact must have shaken the captain's nerves, for a minute later I had the satisfaction of seeing her hard aground on a mud-bank.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Meanwhile the frigate, with every stitch of canvas set, was coming in at a great pace towards the land, and I saw that there was small chance of our escaping her. As long as she held on this course she had the south-westerly breeze almost abeam and travelled twice as fast as we did. But she failed to catch us on that course, and the proximity of the land forcing her to haul up closer to the wind, her speed was considerably reduced.

All the afternoon the chase continued, the enemy slowly but surely overhauling us. Towards four o'clock we were within range of her bow guns, and she amused herself with taking an occasional shot at us. Only the fear that her way might be impeded by them prevented her firing these guns more frequently. I replied with our stern-chasers, but they were not heavy enough to do much mischief. At five o'clock the distance between us was still further greatly reduced, and our only chance of escape now lay in the approach of night. This last hope was swept away when I discovered a Spanish fort standing on a promontory straight ahead of us. If I held on my course I should be exposed to the fire of its heavy guns. If I attempted to avoid them by hauling up closer to the wind I should be allowing the frigate to overtake me. There was only one expedient left for me to try. It was a desperate one, but I determined to resort to it.

Without giving the frigate, which was following closely in my wake, any indication of what I was about to do, I suddenly broached to. In a moment all was noise and discord. The *Chacabuco* shook from stem to stern, the spars creaked and groaned, a sail split from head to foot with the report of a big gun, and the masts quivered till it seemed certain they would snap beneath the violent oscillation. But the timber, though old, was still sound and able to withstand the heavy strain, and as the gear

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

was in good order and the men quick to obey the word of command, I soon had the satisfaction of seeing her head pay off, and gave the order to brace her up on the larboard tack.

Meanwhile our pursuer had been taken so completely by surprise that she did not even fire a broadside at us, as she was carried past our stern at only half a cable's distance. Being between us and the land, the setting sun shone full upon the faces of her crew, turned as they were towards us, and on the quarter-deck, regarding us with rage and disappointment, I recognized Don Guido Villamil. The recognition was evidently mutual, and with an angry gesture he signified to the man at the wheel to follow my example and broach to. But the manœuvre was unskilfully executed, and the helm was no sooner put up than her foretopmast snapped with a loud report, overwhelming a number of the crew in its fall.

Fortunately for her, the frigate was already within range of the battery on shore, and as she lay helpless, drifted still closer to it. If it had not been for the fort we might have attacked the Spanish war-ship with success. As it was, nothing could be done, and I remembered the prize which had escaped us that morning. It was high-water when she went ashore, and she would in consequence find difficulty in getting afloat again. The frigate could not now pursue us, so with a parting shot from my stern-chasers I set sail for the north once more.

Throughout the night we were running back over the same course as that by which we came, and with dawn of the following morning we drew near to the Bio-Bio River. I had hardly slept at all that night, for I was anxious that the prize should not slip past us in the dark and escape once more. I felt fully convinced that no ship

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

with lights had passed within the distance at which such lights were visible, yet when the sun arose the river mouth lay placidly before us, without one sail to relieve its dull monotony of aspect. Our prize had evaded us once more.

I was cursing my ill-luck in thus losing her again, when Rodrigo approached and said, in his respectful manner:

"If señor would examine the horizon with his glass, I think he would descry a sail."

I raised my glass and could just discern the topsails of a ship above the horizon. I altered my course at once and stood out for her. She was running to the southward, and we gained upon her slowly, but in a couple of hours' time I could see her well enough to know she was the ship for which we searched. Either by prearrangement with the frigate which convoyed her, or to avoid the *Chacabuco* in case she should return, the merchantman had sailed some distance out to sea before turning southward for Valdivia.

Once more I started in pursuit, and this time I kept a course between the vessel and the land, to prevent her seeking the protection of a fort or attempting to beach herself. We gained on her slowly but surely, and at noon we came within gunshot. Seeing that escape was impossible, she fired a shot across our bows, and our prompt reply resulted in her striking her flag and shortening sail as a token of surrender. The captain evidently felt that he had done his duty after firing one shot in the direction of the enemy.

My success in at length securing a valuable prize gave me great satisfaction, and I put off myself in the boat which was lowered to take possession of her. On reaching her I was surprised to find that there were no Spanish naval officers or marines on board. The frigate

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

which accompanied her had apparently neglected this precaution, either from sheer carelessness or from confidence that no Chilian ship would dare to attack her convoy.

The captain met me as I stepped on deck, and gave over the ship into my charge. He was a small man of insignificant appearance, and his trembling hand and pallid countenance betrayed the fear inspired by our late exchange of fire. I asked him what cargo he carried and from what port he sailed. In reply, he said that he came from Guambacho, where he had shipped grain, and also a certain quantity of treasure, which was being sent from Lima to Valdivia. "Will señor take a glass of wine?" he added, anxious to propitiate me.

A glass of wine would certainly be welcome to me. For the last twenty-four hours I had scarcely taken anything to eat or drink, and, now that the excitement of the chase was over, Nature began to assert her claims. I accordingly accepted the captain's offer, and he led me aft, stopping with Spanish punctiliousness at the passage leading to the cabin and motioning me to enter first. I did so, and, opening the door at the end of it, was suddenly arrested by the sight I saw. For Don Luis Martinez stood before me with a pistol in his hand, prepared to dispute my entrance, and beyond him Carita Montenar, also on her feet, returned my glance with resolute eyes, trying the while to soothe her terror-stricken mother, who sat on a settee beside her.

CHAPTER VII

DON LUIS recognized me instantly, and, seeing that I was not accompanied by a mob of sailors bent on plunder and destruction, as he had apparently anticipated, he lowered his pistol and said :

"I presume, Señor Wildash, that the ladies will be free from molestation at the hands of your men."

"We do not wage war upon women, señor!" I answered, irritated by the imputation and by the manner in which he spoke, which was more that of a man dictating terms than suing for them.

"What will become of us!" sobbed Señora Montenar, who, although relieved of her worst fears, was still far from reassured.

"Hush, mother!" said Caritá, stroking the señora's hand with a caressing movement. "Señor Wildash dare not ill-treat us!" and she turned her dark eyes upon me with a defiant glance.

It was not a conciliatory speech, and I resented it accordingly.

"There are not many things, señorita," I observed, "which Señor Wildash dare not do!"

At this the señora commenced again to loudly bewail her fate, and it required all her daughter's efforts to quiet her. In spite of the señorita's proud bearing towards myself, I could not help admiring both her spirit and the tenderness she showed towards her mother. Feeling that I had sufficiently asserted my authority, I went on, addressing the elder lady :

SEÑORITA MONTEVAR

"I may tell you, however, señora, that it is not my custom to ill-treat my prisoners of war, especially when they happen to belong to the weaker sex."

At these words the señora became more reassured, and Don Luis, who was toying with his pistol, gloomily said :

"To what port will you take this ship?"

"You will learn in good time, señor," I answered, not liking the tone in which he asked the question.

The young man flushed, and the hand that held his pistol twitched nervously.

"I demand, Señor Wildash," he exclaimed, hotly, "that you make the land at once and put us ashore! We are non-combatants, and have a right to expect it!"

My temper was rising rapidly. Did he purposely try to provoke me to harsh measures?

"As you are a non-combatant," I answered, "you will hand me that pistol of yours at once."

Don Luis hesitated, and I was about to turn and summon half a dozen of my men who were drawn up outside the cabin, when Carita divined my purpose. Running to her cousin, she laid her hand, on which there gleamed a magnificent diamond ring, upon his arm and said :

"Do not be rash, Don Luis! What can you do against a whole ship's crew? Give the pistol to Señor Wildash, as he seems afraid to let you keep it."

Don Luis scowled and threw the pistol down with a loud clatter on the cabin table. Señora Montenar screamed and put her fingers to her ears, expecting that it would explode. I called in one of my men, and told him to take possession of it. Then, nettled by the opposition which the señorita displayed towards me, I said :

"For the present you will all three please to regard

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

yourselves as prisoners confined to the after part of the ship, and you will not appear on deck till you obtain permission." Then, turning to the captain, I continued; "Let me have a word with you, captain, in your private cabin."

I shut the door with some asperity on my three prisoners, and followed the captain into his cabin.

"Where did you take these passengers on board?" I asked, as soon as we had entered.

"From Constitución, señor," he replied.

"And where are they going to?"

"Valdivia, señor. But let me give you some wine," taking a bottle which his servant had just opened, and pouring out a glass. It seemed that he would like to change the subject.

"Answer me one or two questions first," I said. "Did you take in any cargo at Constitución?"

"No, señor; we took no cargo there."

"Then why did you go in?"

The captain hesitated, but, seeing that I was in no humor to be thwarted, he replied:

"The commander of the frigate which convoyed this ship ordered me to go in and take up three passengers."

I began to see how matters stood. Don Guido Villamil, captain of the Spanish frigate, had evidently been in communication with Señora Montenar and her daughter, and had arranged to take them, together with their cousin, Don Luis Martinez, to the Spanish headquarters at Valdivia. It was plain that they had resolved to openly espouse the cause of Spain.

I drained my glass of wine impatiently, and was raising another one to my lips, when the second lieutenant, whom I had brought with me, made his appearance.

"I have placed a man at the wheel, señor," he said,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"and have come to ask you what course to steer. The wind is getting up."

I finished my second glass and went out on deck. The wind had become quite fresh, and the two ships had drifted some distance apart. Delay would be caused by my returning to the *Chacabuco*, so I gave orders for the boat to be hauled up on board the prize. I then signalled to the first lieutenant to steer the course for Valparaiso, and appointed Constitución as a rendezvous, in case we became separated in the night. The prize was soon under sail in the same direction.

The wind increased as the day declined, and an angry, clouded sky obscured the sunset. At dinner, which was served at six, the captain expressed anxiety about the weather. The wind came from the southwest, and was, therefore, almost dead astern. As the ship was heavily laden and did not run well before a following sea, he declared that great care would have to be taken to prevent her being pooped. I thought, however, that his nervousness exaggerated the danger in his eyes, and I was quite content to leave the second lieutenant, who was a good seaman, in charge of the poop till I had finished dinner. Don Luis sat gloomily at table without uttering a word, and ate hardly anything. His looks were as sombre as the elements. Carita moved in and out of the cabin in attendance on her mother, who lay in her berth, prostrated alike by the weather and apprehension of the fate I had in store for her.

After dinner I relieved the second lieutenant at his watch on the poop. The wind was still increasing, and the sea was rising fast. The lights of the *Chacabuco* were visible on the starboard quarter, but they grew fainter and fainter, till at midnight they altogether disappeared. By this time the running sea was really formidable. Although the night was dark, the shadow of

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

the pursuing wave would rise black and threatening above the stern, and the ship would sink deep down into the trough until it seemed impossible she could avoid being engulfed by the overhanging wall of water. Time after time, however, the wave as it advanced would raise the ship upon its crest, and, rushing underneath, leave her unharmed in the succeeding hollow. In direct opposition to the captain's account of her, I thought she ran remarkably well before the wind, and I determined to keep on my course, anxious to get my prize safely into Valparaiso before she could be retaken by the enemy.

The second lieutenant came up to relieve me at one o'clock, and I was just going to turn in, when an exceptionally large wave broke above us, and a mass of white, seething water came tumbling down upon the poop. I had time to seize a stanchion before the water reached me and swept my legs from under me. When I regained my feet I found that the second lieutenant had been dashed against the bulwarks and badly bruised, while one of the two men at the wheel had been washed overboard. At the rate at which we were travelling, it would have been useless even in the daytime to lower a boat and try to find him, but in the dark such a course was out of the question. The ship still quivered from the shock she had received and moved less freely. I saw that it was no longer safe to run before the wind, and, as the steering gear had fortunately not been damaged, I decided to heave her to.

The operation was a slow one, and, while rolling heavily in the trough of the sea, the maintopmast was carried away, hanging with the sails to the leeward, and giving the ship a heavy list in that direction. A sea soon followed which swept away two boats and made matters still worse. The men, however, worked with a will, and I at

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

length succeeded in getting her head to the wind, when she became a little steadier, though the list remained.

It was about this time that I heard a woman's voice calling my name, and by the light of the moon, as she struggled through the scudding clouds, I was astonished to see Señorita Montenar clinging to the bulwarks just in front of me.

"My mother is nearly dead with fright, Señor Wildash," she said, "and to ease her mind I consented to come and ask you if you think the ship will weather the gale."

I was annoyed to find that she had been able to leave the cabin. The doors should have been locked. It was no time for a helpless woman to be on deck.

"No one can tell, señorita," I answered, "but unless that topmast can be cut away there is certainly no hope. You will help us best, however, by remaining below with your mother;" and, finding that the ship heeled still more dangerously over, I called out to the men, asking for volunteers to climb the rigging and cut away the top-mast.

No one answered. The second lieutenant was the only officer on board, and he was incapacitated by his recent accident. Rodrigo, who I felt sure would have responded to my appeal, had unfortunately been left on board the *Chacabuco*. Knowing that sailors will seldom face a dangerous piece of work unless headed by an officer, I seized an axe and began to climb the rigging.

It was not an easy task. The shrouds would slacken as the ship rolled towards the side on which I was ascending, and then become taut with a suddenness that required all my strength to prevent myself being shot as from a catapult into the sea. I could only progress by slow degrees, and my hands were so torn and my limbs bruised by the violence of the movement that I was once

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

or twice on the point of abandoning the attempt in despair. I persevered, however, and when I had reached a point from which I could begin to cut the wreckage away I found that half a dozen men had followed me. We set to work with a will, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the topmast, with all its hamper, fall adrift, after which the ship began at once to right herself.

When I regained the poop, I found Señorita Montenar still there, in the same place where I had left her. She gazed at me with an expression which I could not understand.

"So you have done, yourself, what was necessary?" she said.

"Yes, señorita, with the help of half a dozen men."

"Why did they not go at first, when you asked them to?"

"There was no one to lead them," I answered.

"Is that the way with you English captains?" she inquired, apparently interested in the question. "If the men will not do a thing, you go and do it yourselves?"

"It is sometimes necessary," I responded.

She seemed to ponder for a moment on my answer, then, looking up at me, she said :

"You English are very different to the Spanish. When a Spanish captain wants a thing done, and the men are afraid to do it, he threatens them, or strikes them. Sometimes he succeeds in making them obey him, sometimes he does not. He works on their fear, you on their sense of shame, and with brave men your way should be the best. But," she added, suddenly drawing in as if she had spoken more than she intended, "can I tell my mother that all is safe?"

"I hope to weather the gale now, señorita," I replied.

She thanked me and turned to rejoin her mother in the cabin. I offered to assist her down the ladder from the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

poop, but she refused all help and descended it alone. I was following her, in order to open the door of the passage leading to the cabin, when a sea struck the starboard bow with great violence, and threw the señorita off her feet. I caught her and held her firmly as long as the commotion lasted. The young girl did not utter a word, or make a movement, till the ship was steady again, when, with a little shiver, she freed herself and disappeared within the passage.

The rest of the night I spent on deck, repairing the damage inflicted as far as possible, rigging a jury-mast, and setting the pumps to work to ease her of the water she had shipped. There was plenty to be done and thought of. We were now travelling in a southerly direction, away from Valparaiso. Every mile we covered took us farther from the port for which we were bound, and from our rendezvous with the *Chacabuco* at Constitución. If an enemy's frigate should sight us in the morning, she could make an easy capture. Thus I had much to make me anxious; but, in spite of the occupation for my hands and for my head, my thoughts would keep reverting to the señorita, and to the lurch of the ship, which had thrown us together for a moment. Had the incident still further increased her aversion to me? As for my own feelings, I found it impossible to analyze them, though the fact of my trying to do so gave me food for reflection.

By dawn the wind and sea had greatly moderated, and as the jury-mast was now rigged up, and everything once more ship-shape, I set the ship on her course for the rendezvous at Constitución. Then, thoroughly worn out with the night's exertions, I left the second lieutenant, who had sufficiently recovered from his accident to keep a watch, on deck, and, retiring to the captain's cabin, threw myself on a settee, falling asleep as soon as I closed my eyes.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

My dreams were pleasant ones, and I did not relish being roused, it seemed only half an hour later, and told that Constitución was in sight, and the *Chacabuco* lying to awaiting us. I looked at my watch. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and I had slept nine hours. Hastening on deck, I found that the gale had quite subsided, leaving only a pleasant breeze, and in the clear atmosphere I could see the *Chacabuco* at the entrance to the harbor. I was preparing to signal to her to set on her course for Valparaíso, when Don Luis appeared on deck and advanced towards me.

"I am told, señor," he said, "that this is Constitución which we are now approaching."

"It is, señor," I answered.

"As you have prevented the ladies and myself from going to the port for which we were bound, you cannot, of course, refuse to put us ashore at the place from which we started."

His tone was that of a man who demanded a right rather than requested a favor, and it was little to my taste. Besides, an hour's delay might make all the difference to me in gaining Valparaíso in safety. Accordingly I answered :

"The safe arrival of my prize in port must take precedence of the convenience of the passengers who happen to have shipped on board of her."

Don Luis bit his lip and frowned. He could not realize that I was no longer a paid servant of his father.

"But it is against the rules of war to treat non-combatants so disgracefully."

I shrugged my shoulders. His contention was not worth an answer. Realizing that he would not gain his end by assuming such a tone, he went on :

"It is not for myself that I made the demand, but on

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

behalf of the ladies who have intrusted themselves to my care."

He spoke with an air of proprietorship which I did not like.

"What the ladies may wish I do not know," I answered, "nor was I aware that you were made their spokesman. Last night, when you might have been of service to them, I did not see you on deck. It was Señorita Montenar who brought me a message from her mother."

At the time I attributed his non-appearance to fear, but in this I afterwards heard I did him an injustice. Like most Chilians who are not seafaring men, he was a poor sailor, and the rolling of the ship as she lay in the trough of the sea on the previous night had confined him to his cabin. My shot, however, went home, and, flushing deeply, he answered:

"I came because I wished to spare the ladies the humiliation of pleading their case before you in person. But as you seem to insist on it, I will inform them of your will."

So saying, he turned upon his heel and stalked angrily away. I had a sudden impulse to recall him. The ill opinion which the señorita already entertained of me would now be hopelessly confirmed by my thus parading my authority. Pride, however, shut my mouth, and I let the youth go on his way.

The flags forming the signal lay on the quarter-deck, and the signal-man stood by them ready to hoist them at a word from me. But I did not speak, for my thoughts were on another subject. What would Señorita Montenar think of the message Don Luis must be giving her, embellished, no doubt, by his personal rancor against myself? He had probably spoken the truth when he said that they wished to land at Constitución. They might

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

have friends there who would make them comfortable till they found an opportunity of continuing their journey to Valdivia. Now they would have to go to Valparaiso, for it could not be expected that a high-spirited girl like Señorita Montenar would stoop to plead to me at my dictation, and, after my interview with Don Luis, my own pride prevented me from asking them what they would like to do in the matter.

I was on the point of giving the order to hoist the signal, when I saw the señorita coming towards me. She was paler than usual, I thought, and her large, dark eyes wore an expression which I could not fathom.

"We are drawing near to Constitución, are we not, Señor Wildash?" she inquired.

"We are, señorita," I replied.

"Did you think of going in there?"

"It was not my intention," I responded.

"Would it be delaying you too much if you went in close enough to hail a shore-boat to take my mother, my cousin, and myself ashore?"

Her manner was so different to what I had expected that I could not find my tongue at once. Perhaps Don Luis had not carried out his threat, after all. The señorita's bearing was not that of a proud girl driven to ask a favor at the instigation of the person who alone was able to grant it. In fact, she uttered the request so naturally that she seemed to be bestowing a favor rather than appealing for one. Seeing my hesitation, however, she continued :

"I should not have asked you to go out of your course if it were not on account of my mother's ill-health. Her strength has been greatly tried during the last two days. The prolonging of the voyage might affect it seriously."

"Your wish shall be complied with, señorita," I returned.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

A look of relief came into her eyes, and after a few words of thanks she turned and went below again.

I signalled to the *Chacabuco* that I was going into Constitución to land some passengers, after which the two ships would sail for Valparaiso. I then stood in for the port, and began to shorten sail, as, although I did not intend to anchor, the vessel would have to lessen her speed. A shore-boat came alongside as soon as we entered the bay. Señora Montenar, whose spirits had risen wonderfully with the prospect of getting ashore, and who took it as a matter of course that she should be landed there, scarcely deigned to notice me as she passed on her way to the boat. Her daughter bowed and seemed about to speak, when Don Luis, who was following close behind her, stepped forward, and, taking off his hat with great ceremony, said :

"Adieu, Señor Wildash ; when we meet again, it will be, I hope, on equal terms."

The señorita glanced at him, I thought, reprovingly, and the color mounted to her cheek. But she said nothing and passed down into the boat. A minute later they were pulling for the shore, while we set sail for Valparaiso.

As I wished to lose no time, I had decided not to return to the *Chacabuco* till we reached our destination. The second lieutenant was still on watch, and I intended to relieve him in an hour's time, at sunset. Meanwhile, I sat on the hammocks on the larboard side of the quarter-deck, watching the waves go dancing by, for the wind was fresh, and we were travelling some ten knots an hour through the water. The sun shone brightly as it neared the horizon out to sea, and the waves sparkled like diamonds in its dazzling rays. Whether it was due to that touch of sadness which a sunset at sea—and for that matter, on land as well—inspires, or arose from the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

reaction after the excitement and hard work of the last two days, I experienced a deep depression, accompanied by a repugnance for the work in which I was engaged. To seize unprotected merchant ships, causing the crew to lose their money and employment, and subjecting harmless passengers to all kinds of inconvenience—it seemed no better than the calling of a pirate or buccaneer of days gone by ! I had not even the satisfaction of doing it in my country's service. In fact, I was nothing else than a hired mercenary, paid to fight those with whom I had no quarrel.

The beautiful sunset, then, only served to put me out of conceit with my life and my surroundings, and in a discontented spirit I left the deck, intending to spend below what time remained before I took my watch.

Without any definite object, I looked into the cabin, and, finding it empty, was turning away again, when a travelling beam of light from a port illumined something on the floor. It disappeared almost instantaneously, but with the roll of the ship the beam of light returned, and I was able to locate the object. Picking it up, I found it to be a diamond ring—in fact, the same one that I had noticed on the señorita's finger. I gazed at it in wonder. It was of antique workmanship, and composed of the most beautiful stones I had ever seen.

As I examined it curiously I remembered what Antonio had said of Don Luis's infatuation for his cousin. Had he been accepted by her, and was this the token of betrothal ? In any case, for the wearer's sake, I determined to take care of it till I found an opportunity of restoring it to her. When, if ever, would this opportunity occur ?

CHAPTER VIII

We reached Valparaiso safely the following morning, and on entering the bay found two ships of the Chilian fleet, the *San Martin* and the *Independencia*, lying there. The *San Martin* was Admiral Blanco's ship, and as he was the next in command to Lord Cochrane, it was my duty to report myself to him. Accordingly, as soon as we had anchored, I proceeded to the admiral's ship. The second lieutenant received me on deck. He was a young Chilian belonging to the extreme faction which was opposed to Lord Cochrane, and plotted to get Admiral Blanco an equal share in the command. My reception, as an Englishman, and a partisan of the English admiral, was consequently not a cordial one.

"Is the admiral on board?" I asked.

"Yes, but he cannot see you now. He is too busy."

His manner was decidedly abrupt.

"In that case," I answered, "I may as well go back again."

This was hardly what the young officer desired. If the admiral heard that I had come and been sent back again, he might get into trouble. Accordingly he said:

"It would not be worth your while, for he will be disengaged in half an hour."

I resigned myself to wait that time, but, feeling little inclined for conversation with such a companion, I leaned over the bulwarks and gazed across the bay. The young fellow's curiosity soon prompted him to speak again, and he said:

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Where did you get that prize?"

"Off the Bio-Bio," I answered.

"It was an easy capture, I presume," he observed, with an accent of disdain.

"If you would undertake to capture a similar vessel when under the convoy of a fifty-gun Spanish frigate, I would willingly resign the command of the *Chacabuco* in your favor for the occasion."

This silenced him for a while, but, being as eager to impart his news as to learn mine, he soon went on:

"I do not wonder that the Spanish are getting confident in the south, when they see we can do nothing against them in the north."

It was now my turn to be curious, but I said nothing, knowing that I should hear it all without the trouble of asking for it. I was right, for he continued:

"Those rockets made by your countryman, Mr. Goldsack, which were to do such great things against the Spanish fleet, proved a complete failure. Not one in six went off properly. Some burst on board the rafts, injuring our own men, some took a wrong direction, owing to their sticks being badly made, and hardly any of them reached the enemy. Meanwhile we were exposed to a fire of red-hot cannon-balls from the forts, and, as a set-off against the long list of killed and wounded with which we at length retired, only one small Spanish gun-boat had been sunk."

This was serious news. The rockets had been expected to do a great deal of mischief.

"But what of the explosion ships?" I asked.

"They effected even less damage than the rockets," my companion replied, relating with evident relish the series of misfortunes. "Only one was used, and she exploded long before she reached the Spanish shipping."

The failure of the explosion ships must have been a

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

bitter disappointment to Lord Cochrane. After his experience in the Aix roads, he had naturally built great hopes on them.

"What has Lord Cochrane effected, then?" I asked, determined to learn the worst.

"Nothing beyond one or two insignificant captures of small trading vessels. The Spaniards were so emboldened by his want of success, that once, during his temporary absence from Callao, they sailed out of the harbor and drove away two of our ships which were left to maintain the blockade. Soon after this an epidemic broke out on this ship and the *Independencia*, and we were ordered to Valparaiso to recruit. We arrived here about three weeks ago, and have heard nothing of Lord Cochrane since."

I could quite understand the reluctance of the commander-in-chief to return to Valparaiso, with Callao still in the hands of the enemy. With his reduced fleet, I also feared that he might make some rash attempt upon the port, which would end in a catastrophe. I was on the point of asking further particulars, when the first lieutenant made his appearance, and, learning that I wished to see the admiral, said that he was now disengaged.

Admiral Blanco Encalada, who was a good-looking man of about fifty years of age, received me courteously. He had shown his disinterested spirit by voluntarily resigning the command of the fleet to Lord Cochrane, and had never encouraged the efforts of those who wished to place him on an equality with the English admiral. On hearing that I had captured a valuable prize, he seemed much pleased, and congratulated me on my success, observing that it was all the more acceptable at a time when the rest of the fleet had met with little good fortune. With regard to my orders, he thought I could not do better than continue cruising over the same

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ground as before; but when I told him that I was badly in need of men, he said he could not help me, as he was unable to get enough to man his own ship. I was quite at liberty, however, to recruit on my own account, if I thought there was any chance of success.

The task was not an easy one, I found. Although the officers and crew of the *Chacabuco* were entitled to a share in the prize we had taken, there was no hope, to judge from the conduct of the Chilian government in previous cases, of our receiving even the smallest fraction of it. Worse still, the men's pay, which was several months in arrears, was not forthcoming. It was not surprising, then, that recruits were difficult to find. Only when I had pestered the government into paying a portion of the arrears did I succeed in inducing a few more men to join the ship, and at length, weary of such thankless work, I determined to sail with the crew I had, amounting to barely two-thirds of the number with which I had left Valparaiso on the previous cruise.

It was not long before I had reason to regret my rashness. One afternoon I sighted a vessel which proved to be a Spanish merchantman, and, giving chase, was anticipating an easy capture, when she overtook a large convoy, to which she evidently belonged. Two frigates were in attendance, and they at once bore down upon me. The convoy was sailing south, so I shaped a due northerly course, thinking that the frigates would not run the risk of separating themselves by any great distance from the ships of which they were in charge. They gained, however, so rapidly upon me that they were led to continue the pursuit. I put on every stitch of canvas, and hugged the land to prevent them attacking me on both sides at once. They were soon within gunshot, and one opened fire on the stern and the other on the larboard quarter of the *Chacabuco*.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I cleared the decks, determined to fight as long as I had a man left to fire the guns. The frigate on my larboard quarter received most of my attention, and was, of course, most able to reply to it. Her fire, as she overhauled us, became very deadly, and we had not been in action more than half an hour when my first lieutenant, who was standing at my side, was cut in two by a round ball, which killed two sailors and wounded four others. I saw that my only chance lay in disabling the enemy, and, having ordered the men to fire at the rigging only, they were at length successful in carrying away her fore and mizzen topmasts. This checked her speed for a time, and we turned our attention to the frigate astern of us.

But it was not long before the rate at which the *Chacabuco* travelled was reduced by damage to her sails, and the frigates once more began to gain on us. They now drew so near that each shot took effect. The number of our killed and wounded increased at an alarming rate, and I was beginning to abandon hope, when the second lieutenant, who was attending to the navigation of the ship, called out that Talcahuano was in sight. Talcahuano was in possession of the patriots, and if I could reach the protection of the fort I should be safe. I picked my way along the deck, now slippery with human blood, and called upon my men to make a final effort, as we were nearing port. The survivors responded pluckily, and the vigorous cannonade that followed, as well as the sight of the harbor we were making, caused the enemy to cease firing and abandon the pursuit.

The *Chacabuco* crawled into Talcahuano like a wounded animal into its lair. The few men that still remained uninjured were so exhausted that I could neither get the sails taken in nor the anchor let go in time to avoid a wreck, the broken masts of which I only saw too late to

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

escape it. We struck her fully amidships, but our way was such that, after a sharp crunching and groaning of timber, we were carried right over the vessel, getting clear of her on the other side.

The anchor was now at length let go, but the carpenter, whom I sent to examine the hold, reported that the ship had sprung a leak, and that the water was gaining rapidly. In this extremity two vessels which were lying in the harbor—the *Montezuma*, a schooner belonging to the Chilian fleet, and the *Intrepido*, a brig of war from Buenos Ayres—sent off boats to my assistance. They took off the dead and wounded, and then, as the *Chacabuco* was unmistakably settling down, they helped me to weigh anchor and run her ashore. With the remnant of my crew, and a few men from the schooner and the brig, I remained on board all night, to see if anything could be done to patch her up at slack tide on the following morning.

It was low water at eight o'clock, when the examination which was made proved that much more damage had been inflicted than I supposed. Nothing could be done to repair her till she was lightened of her guns and ammunition, and run still higher up on the beach. At the most favorable estimate, it would be several weeks before she would be fit to go to sea again.

The examination had only just been concluded when Rodrigo, who, like myself, had come out unharmed from yesterday's fight, called my attention to a sail in the offing, which he thought must be the *O'Higgins*. I inspected her through my glass, and found that he was right. My predicament was a decidedly unpleasant one. It was unfortunate enough to have knocked a hole in the *Chacabuco*'s bottom, but for the ship to be discovered by the admiral beached, and without any repairs effected, was very bad luck indeed. However, I was bound to re-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

port the mishap, and as soon as the *O'Higgins* anchored I put off in a boat for her.

The captains of the schooner *Montezuma* and the brig of war *Intrepido* had already reached the flag-ship, so that when I stepped on deck I heard that the admiral was engaged with them. The officer on watch confirmed all that the second lieutenant of the *San Martin* had told me, and further stated that Lord Cochrane, having separated his ship from the rest of the fleet, had conceived a plan which, if successful, would fully retrieve his failure in the north. This plan was at present a secret, but if the admiral's visit to Talcahuano resulted in his obtaining what he wanted there would no longer be any objection to divulging it.

My curiosity was greatly aroused by the communication, and as I was wondering what it could mean, Lord Cochrane himself appeared on deck with his two visitors. After parting with them at the gangway, he caught sight of me and said :

"So, Wildash, the *Chacabuco* has been in collision with a wreck, and was beached to prevent her sinking. How did the accident occur?"

I explained that I had been engaging a couple of Spanish frigates, and that the remnant of my men were too exhausted to handle the ship properly.

"Well, I dare say it was no fault of yours," he said, kindly. "Those two captains who have just left told me that the greater part of your men were either killed or wounded, so you must have had a hard fight. When I first discovered that the *Chacabuco* was ashore I was much annoyed, being sorely in need of another ship; but now that I have been offered the use of the *Intrepido* I shall, together with the *Montezuma*, have enough for my purpose. How many men have you?"

"Only twelve marines and twenty sailors who are fit for work."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Lord Cochrane looked grave.

"It is men that I am now particularly in need of. I must get them somewhere. Put the *Chacabuco* into the hands of the ship-builders, and come on board the *O'Higgins* with all the men you can muster."

I left the flag-ship at once to carry out this order, and by sunset that day I had made the necessary arrangements for the *Chacabuco* with a ship-builder, and had embarked all my sound men on the *O'Higgins*. Lord Cochrane rode over to Concepción soon after my interview with him in the morning, and did not return that night. The following afternoon, however, troops were observed marching down to the beach, and a message was sent by the admiral, ordering out all boats to assist in embarking them on board the *O'Higgins*, the *Montezuma*, and *Intrepido*. The soldiers, two hundred and fifty in all, were on board by five o'clock, when the three ships got under way. I now learned for the first time that our destination was Valdivia.

My astonishment will be understood when I have said that Valdivia was the most strongly fortified harbor on the west coast of South America. It was protected by nine forts, containing in all one hundred and eighteen guns. Particulars of these forts were in the possession of Lord Cochrane. With the exception of El Yngles, each of them was secured with a rampart and a deep ditch. El Yngles, the most northerly of the five forts on the peninsula which forms the western side of the harbor, had a wall faced with palisades. A dense forest growth cut off communication between the forts except by a narrow, rugged path along the rocks which line the beach. Between the two most southerly forts, Chorocamayo and Corral, this path crossed a deep ravine, where it was enfiladed by three guns on the Fort Corral side. The forts were garrisoned by a thousand soldiers,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

against whom we could send no more than three hundred and fifty.

Such was the confidence, however, which Lord Cochrane inspired, that I dare affirm no one on board the three ships considered the odds too great to be attempted. This confidence was still further increased by the presence of Major Miller, the dashing English officer who had already distinguished himself on several landing expeditions in command of the marines. Only two months previously he had been very seriously wounded in an attack upon Pisco, one ball piercing his right arm, another permanently disabling his left hand, while a third entered his chest, and after fracturing a rib passed out of his back. His life was despaired of at the time, and he was still so feeble that when accompanying Lord Cochrane on his recent visit to Concepcion he had to be lifted on and off his horse. Yet, in spite of his physical weakness, he was as eager as any one for the coming fight.

We had a light, contrary wind at starting, but it fell calm soon after dark. The second lieutenant kept watch till midnight, when I was to relieve him. I turned in about nine o'clock to get some rest before my watch, and had been asleep about a couple of hours, when a tremendous shock awoke me. I hurried up on deck, to find a midshipman rubbing his eyes as if he had just been roused from sleep, while the second lieutenant was nowhere to be seen.

I soon learned what had happened. The lieutenant, finding that the calm continued, told the midshipman to call him if a breeze sprang up, and went below. The midshipman fell asleep, and, a wind rising, the ship drifted on to a rock off the island of Quiriquina, on which she appeared to be suspended amidships. Every one had been roused by the shock, and the greatest con-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

fusion existed, as she was expected every minute to break in pieces.

In the midst of the hubbub Lord Cochrane walked on deck, and his coolness was very striking. He gave the order to get out the kedges with as much composure as if the *O'Higgins* were lying securely at anchor in a land-locked harbor. Fortunately, although the wind was rising, the sea remained comparatively calm, and the swell was not sufficient to break up the ship upon the rock. The kedges were placed in position under the admiral's own directions, and after four hours' hard work with all hands the *O'Higgins* was warped off the rock.

Fearing that she might sink at any moment, there was a general desire to ascertain the amount of damage done. One of the officers, seeing that Lord Cochrane did not give any orders to that effect, approached him and said :

"Shall I send the carpenter to examine her bottom, my lord?"

I was standing close to the admiral, and I shall not easily forget the look he gave the speaker.

"Certainly not!" he answered, sternly. "Put her on her course for Valdivia again!" and without another word he strode off towards his cabin.

As the *O'Higgins* shaped her course out to sea again, the sailors and soldiers alike thought they were being taken to certain death. The *Montezuma* and the *Intrepido* were both out of sight, and the boats could not have accommodated more than a hundred and fifty out of the five hundred men on board. But such was the influence of Lord Cochrane's dauntless courage that no outcry was raised against his decision. In fact, it was not till the ship began to sink appreciably in the water that an officer ventured to disobey orders and send the carpenter

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to examine the bottom. He reported four feet of water in the hold, but no one had the courage to inform the admiral of the fact.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, while I was on watch, Lord Cochrane came up from his cabin and paced the poop with an air of grave pre-occupation. I happened to be talking with Major Miller, and after a little time he came and spoke to us.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "we must take Valdivia. Sooner than put back, it would be better that we all went to the bottom."

Major Miller, with his usual resolution, fully acquiesced in his lordship's words. It was evident that they both felt keenly the failure of their operations in the north, and were determined to stake their fortunes on a desperate hazard. These brave men doubtless preferred death to ill-success. Such courage was contagious, and, though I had less at stake, my spirit fully shared their sentiments.

Lord Cochrane seemed pleased by the readiness with which we approved of his decision, and went on in lighter tones :

"Cool calculation would make it appear that the attempt to take Valdivia is madness. This is one reason why the Spaniards will hardly believe us in earnest, even when we commence, and you will see that a bold onset, and a little perseverance afterwards, will give a complete triumph. For operations unexpected by the enemy are, when well executed, almost certain to succeed, whatever may be the odds, and success will preserve the enterprise from the imputation of rashness."

The undertaking was exactly after Major Miller's heart, and in spite of his physical weakness his eyes glistened with the thought of it. This conversation so confirmed Lord Cochrane in the resolution he had taken

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

that he would not receive any report of the water in the hold till sunset. It was then five feet. He made no comment, and, his servant saying that dinner was ready, he went below to take it.

At eight o'clock there was seven feet of water in the hold. The carpenter could not get the pumps to work, and baling out by means of buckets had no appreciable effect in staying the increasing flow of water. The powder-magazine was already flooded, and all the powder and ammunition spoiled. The ship was thirty miles from land, and the nearest coast was inhabited by the barbarous Araucanian Indians, who, encouraged by the Spaniards, delighted in torturing and killing any patriot Chilians who were wrecked upon their shores.

It was now that the perseverance with which Lord Cochrane had in his early days made himself acquainted with each detail of his profession stood him in good stead. Taking off his coat, he set to work on one of the pumps, and after a couple of hours' application to the task he succeeded in putting it in order. A second pump was rendered efficient by him in the same manner. By midnight they were both working, and prevented the water from gaining any further on the ship.

Thus, in the first instance by his cool courage, and in the second by his technical skill, he prevented a panic among the crew and the terrible results of a scramble of five hundred men for boats which would not hold one-third of the number. It was the admiral alone who saved the ship.

CHAPTER IX

THE following morning we rejoined the *Montezuma* and *Intrepido*, and with contrary winds it was five days later before we reached the latitude of Valdivia. In order to allay the suspicions of the Spaniards, Lord Cochrane determined to transfer the men from the *O'Higgins* to the schooner and the brig, leaving the former to cruise about out of sight of land. The transshipment was effected in a heavy sea, about thirty miles from Valdivia. Major Miller was still so weak that when he tried to scramble on board the schooner by the main chains he found himself unequal to the effort, and would have fallen back into the water had not the admiral himself caught hold of him and lifted him on board.

It was Lord Cochrane's original intention to make the attack after dark that night, but, a calm having fallen, the schooner and the brig did not arrive at Valdivia till the following day. Hoisting the Spanish colors, the two vessels anchored at three o'clock in the afternoon opposite the only landing-place outside the harbor, and right under the guns of Fort Yngles. When hailed from the shore, Captain Basques, a Spaniard by birth, who had embarked with the expedition at Talcahuano as a volunteer, was directed to answer that the ships had sailed from Cadiz under convoy of the *St. Elmo*, of seventy-four guns, and that they had parted with her in a gale of wind off Cape Horn. The information was followed with a request to send off a pilot.

As a heavy surf was breaking on the shore, Lord Coch-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rane thought it advisable to try and delay the attack till the evening, when the sea and wind would probably have moderated. But the Spaniards were not to be so easily deceived, and in answer to our request demanded that we should send a boat ashore. Our reply that they had all been washed overboard in the gale apparently confirmed their suspicions, and alarm guns were immediately fired. The garrisons of all the forts on the western side of the bay sent reinforcements to Fort Yngles. Fifty or sixty men were posted on the rampart commanding the approach from the landing-place, and three hundred more were drawn up on an esplanade at the rear of the fort.

So far hostilities had not commenced, but about four o'clock one of the two launches which had been lowered from the *Montezuma* to take the men ashore, and were concealed from the enemy on the farther side of the schooner, broke adrift and became visible at the stern. The Spaniards, being now fully informed of our character, opened fire, and the first ball penetrated the schooner's side on a level with the lower deck, killing two of the marines, who had all been ordered to go down there out of sight. As further deception was impossible, and the men in their crowded state were much exposed on board, Lord Cochrane had no alternative but to give the word to land.

I volunteered for the first boat, which Major Miller was to command. Rodrigo obtained permission to accompany me, and we took our places in the bow. The launch had been brought round to the side of the schooner nearest to the fort, and while it was being manned I watched a detachment of the enemy leaving the fort to dispute the landing-place. The narrow path did not admit of two abreast, so that I could easily count them as they passed along. Their number amounted to seventy-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

five. When forty-four men had entered our launch we put off for the shore.

There was a heavy swell running, and our progress was consequently slow. Nearer the land, too, we fell across a patch of sea-weed, which entangled our oars and still further hindered us. Meanwhile the detachment at the landing-place had opened a brisk fire upon us, and two of our men were quickly wounded. A little later the coxswain was shot through the shoulder, and Major Miller, who was seated astern, took the tiller from him. At first the major seated himself on the handle of a spare oar, in order to get a better view ahead, but, finding the seat uncomfortable, he took a lower one. No sooner had he done so than his hat was pierced by a bullet, which but for his late change of position would infallibly have pierced his head.

The fire from the shore became very warm as we drew near, and the boat, riddled with bullets, began to fill with water. The men at the oars, having never been in action, became alarmed, and one of them stopped rowing. Had not a marine struck this man with his musket and compelled him to go on again, his example would have been followed by the others, and our assault would have failed at the very start. As it was, the boat kept on her way, and Major Miller having encouraged the rowers by ordering our men to fire a volley for the first time, we soon reached the land.

Rodrigo and I were the first to jump ashore and rush up the rocky beach to the level ground where the enemy were stationed. Supported as we were by the bayonets of the marines, they did not wait our onset, but retreated along the narrow path to the fort. Major Miller was too weak to climb the rocks without assistance, but his dauntless spirit made him as eager for the fight as the most able-bodied man among us.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

We now formed on the spot from which we had driven the enemy, and awaited the landing of the rest of our party. Although there were only two boats, a force of three hundred and fifty men were ashore by sunset. As soon as it was dark, Major Miller gave the order to advance, the van being taken by a chosen body of marines. If the enemy had held the narrow pathway they could easily have kept us in check, but they all re-entered the fort by means of a scaling-ladder, which they hauled up after them. Our front ranks kept silence, but the rear ranks broke into cheers, so that the fire of the fort was directed against those who were farthest from, instead of nearest to, them.

It was clearly impossible to scale the rampart at the point where we reached it, and I accompanied a lieutenant of marines with a dozen of his men on a reconnaissance at the back of the fort. It seemed equally impracticable here, till Rodrigo, with a sailor's ready invention, began to tear up some wooden palisades which he found there, and lash them together in the form of a rough ladder. It was soon completed and laid against the rampart, when the whole of our small party gained an entrance to the fort.

We drew up our men under cover of some trees which grew within the rampart. The enemy had their backs to us, intent on repelling the main portion of our force in front of them, so that when we fired a volley and charged down upon them with bayonets fixed they were completely taken by surprise. Without waiting to see our numbers, they turned and fled towards a gate on the farther side of the fort.

Our men were now scaling the rampart at several points, and when we were sufficiently reinforced we started in pursuit. The Spaniards made a short stand near some buildings just within the farther gate. A

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

couple of men at my side were struck down by their fire, and our advance was momentarily checked. In this rally a Spanish naval officer made himself conspicuous, and as he passed in front of a lighted window I was astonished to recognize Don Guido Villamil. The sight of him inflamed me, and I rushed at him with my drawn sword. He held his ground, and we were soon engaged in a fierce encounter. His men, however, began to desert him, and he was compelled to retreat. I pursued him through the gate on to the esplanade, where I had seen three hundred soldiers stationed. Instead of a determined resistance from these men, I found that all had withdrawn, the panic within the fort having evidently been communicated to those without it.

We now came to another narrow foot-path leading to the other forts, three of which we entered in succession and found deserted. In my eagerness to overtake Don Guido I frequently stumbled and fell in the rocky foot-way between the forts, or ran into the bushes on either side. At length I found myself descending the steep side of a ravine, which I knew must be the one between forts Corocomayo and Corral. I was nearing the bottom when I heard Rodrigo's voice some little way behind me :

" This way, señor ; they have gone this way."

I ran back and found Rodrigo at the entrance to a narrow path on the left, which in my haste I had passed unnoticed. A wounded man lay a few yards down it, and it was his groaning which had attracted the boatswain's attention. I ran down this path as quickly as I could, but my progress was much impeded by the over-hanging brushwood, and by the still more uneven surface of the ground. Stumbling over another wounded man, I found that the path began to descend. At the same time I heard the wash of the sea against the rocks, and I understood why this route had been followed.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

With a final effort I plunged onward, emerging suddenly from the wood on to some rough bowlders at the water's edge. A boat was lying there, and the last man, an officer in naval uniform, entered it as I appeared. Although I could not see his face, I knew it was Don Guido Villamil, and I emptied my pistol at him. The boat, however, put off and pulled away without response, and I saw that he had escaped uninjured.

Fort Corral, the largest and strongest of the five, still remained uncaptured, and, retracing my steps to the main path, I descended the ravine in which I had been when Rodrigo called me back. A good number of our men had overtaken me, and on ascending the opposite side we fell across the three guns which enfiladed the path. If these had been manned the enemy, with a little resolution, could have effectually barred our progress. They were, however, deserted, and we passed on without encountering any opposition.

The gates of Fort Corral were closed against us, but after a short inspection a spot was found where the rampart had crumbled down and partially filled the ditch. At this place we managed to effect an entrance, and then encountered the only real resistance which had yet been offered. The resolution with which the enemy fought, after their previous display of cowardice, took us by surprise, and was not explained till afterwards, when we found that there was no path by which they could escape on the farther side of the fort, and that they had thus been fighting for their lives. After a fierce and protracted struggle, in which we bayoneted a hundred of them, the remainder, amounting to about the same number, surrendered, and all the forts on the western side of the bay were in our possession.

The work had occupied much more time than it takes to describe, and day was dawning when Fort Corral fell.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

At the muster which followed, our gallant leader, Major Miller, was found to be missing. Remembering his weak state, I had given him up for lost, when he was carried into the fort by two of his men. In the gray morning light, with his pale face and bare head, he seemed more like a corpse than a living man. His indomitable spirit, however, still supported him, and, telling his men to put him on a bench outside one of the buildings, he eagerly inquired how we had fared. The lieutenant of marines, who had been among the first throughout the fight, told him the story, and his bright eyes gleamed with satisfaction.

"I wish I had been with you!" he exclaimed. "I had to be lifted up the rampart of Fort Yngles, and then I fell from exhaustion in the path beyond it. I lay there till these men found me, when I told them to bring me to the front at once."

The major, indeed, afforded a striking instance of the triumph of mind over matter. But his weakness was not the result of his former illness only. As I looked at him I noticed that the hair on the top of his head was matted with blood. When I drew his attention to the fact he put up his hand and found that the blood was still oozing from a wound there.

"I had forgotten all about it," he said, "but the wound must have been caused by that bullet which took off my hat as we were rowing for the shore. It is nothing serious;" and, tying up the place with his handkerchief, he requested to be carried within, in order to write his report to Lord Cochrane.

Meanwhile a good store of provisions had been found in the fort, and after their hard night's work our men sat down to their breakfast with good appetites. At the conclusion of the meal they were enjoying a rest when the firing of guns was heard, and the forts on the east-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ern side of the harbor were found to be attacking the *Montezuma* and *Intrepido* as they entered the bay. Our ships shaped their course for our side of the harbor, and let go anchor out of range of the enemy's guns. I looked in vain for the Spanish frigate of which Don Guido held command. Had he lost it, or had some other officer replaced him? A Spanish merchant vessel named *Dolores* lay off Fort Corral, and was made an easy capture. No other ship could be seen in the harbor.

Shortly after the *Montezuma* and *Intrepido* let go their anchors Lord Cochrane signalled to Major Miller, instructing him to re-embark two hundred men, in order to gain possession of the other side of the harbor. The major at once complied, marching the men to the place where Don Guido had escaped the previous night. I accompanied them, and, as the ship's boats were waiting for us, we were soon put on board. I had not yet despaired of effecting Don Guido's capture, but my hopes in this respect were doomed to speedy disappointment. When the ships weighed anchor and stood over to the other side, the forts, after one round of shot, ceased firing, and their garrisons could be seen in full retreat. On landing we took, unopposed, possession of the remainder of the forts. The same evening the *O'Higgins* entered the bay almost waterlogged, and had to be beached to prevent her sinking.

Thus the harbor of Valdivia, which was called the Gibraltar of South America, fell into our hands. The capture was a valuable one, for the Spaniards had large stores of ammunition there, as well as a great quantity of gold utensils, which they had taken from Concepcion. The moral effect of the victory was even greater than the material, and Spanish supremacy in Southern Chile had received its death-blow.

There still remained, however, the town of Valdivia

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to take, and the following morning Lord Cochrane proceeded up the river with two hundred troops. Although the Spanish governor had five hundred men at his command, he did not offer any resistance, and when we entered the town we found that the garrison had fled. From papers which fell into the admiral's hands he learned that the soldiers on the island of Chiloe were in a mutinous condition, and the occasion was thought opportune to attempt its capture. Accordingly, after a provisional government had been arranged, Lord Cochrane set sail for the island in the *Montezuma* and *Dolores*, with Major Miller and two hundred men. Much to my chagrin I was left behind to superintend the repairs to the *O'Higgins*.

CHAPTER X

THE expedition to Chiloe ended in a failure. The garrison, which was suspected of disaffection, proved loyal, and the patriots, who made the attack in daylight, were beaten off with considerable loss. They retreated in good order, taking their wounded with them, and then the two ships returned to Valdivia. Osorno was the only town of consequence on the mainland south of Valdivia that still remained in the hands of the Spanish, and Lord Cochrane was anxious to take possession of it before setting sail for Valparaiso. A hundred men were considered sufficient for the task, and Major Beauchef was put in command of them. As the admiral was now supervising the repairs to the *O'Higgins* himself, I obtained permission to accompany the expedition.

Osorno is about forty miles to the south of Valdivia. Marching by easy stages, we arrived within sight of the town on the morning of the third day. As usual, the Spaniards evacuated it without striking a blow, and we entered into possession. They had fled, we heard, to the coast in order to get a passage to Chiloe, the only stronghold which enjoyed their confidence.

Being unable to spare a garrison for Osorno, Major Beauchef blew up the fort, and was about to return to Valdivia when three men, dressed in Chilian peasant costume, approached him and said that a small detachment of Spanish soldiers from Osorno had betaken themselves to a castle of the name of Monzana, which lay to the southeast of the town.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The peasants declared that if the soldiers were allowed to remain they would be sure to pillage the surrounding country, and they asked the major to drive them out of the neighborhood.

Major Beauchef thought twenty men would be sufficient for the undertaking, and, detaching that number, asked me if I would like to take command of them. I was glad to receive an offer of that character, but prudence demanded that I should first make inquiries concerning the fortifications, if any, of the castle, and the number of men who occupied it. With regard to the first point, our informants replied that there were no regular fortifications, but only a high wall such as often surrounds a private residence. On the second point they were more at variance, but all three agreed that twenty armed men would be ample for the enterprise.

On the strength of this information, I accepted the command of the little expedition. It was now about eight o'clock in the morning, and the castle being ten miles distant I decided to start at once. Taking a day's provisions with us, and the three peasants as our guides, we left Osorno soon after nine. We marched leisurely, and by noon reached the banks of a river, a mile beyond which, as our guides informed us, the castle of Monzana stood. A wooded, undulating country lay on the other side of the river, and hid the structure from our view. The river-bed was nearly forty yards wide, and in winter the water no doubt covered the whole of it. In summer, as it was now, the river had shrunk to a narrow channel, in the centre barely twenty feet wide.

Two of our guides now expressed a wish to leave us, as they lived on the near side of the river, and had some distance to walk to their homes. I attributed this request to their fear of the Spaniards, and an anxiety to avoid being seen in our company, in case our expedition

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

should prove unsuccessful. Not wishing, however, to detain them against their will, I made no objection to their departure, merely contenting myself with rallying them on their want of confidence in the issue of our enterprise. The third man, a tall, gaunt fellow, with a terrible squint, smiled grimly at my words, and, without opening his lips, led the way over a line of stepping-stones to the centre of the river.

Here we found a narrow plank thrown across two rocky ledges some eighteen feet apart. The slender bridge swayed dangerously as the gaunt guide strode across it, but he reached the other side in safety, and I was the next to follow him. The water rushed in swirling eddies between the walls of rock, and the channel seemed very deep. I questioned the guide on the point when I gained the opposite bank, but he appeared unable to give the depth. It was doubtless, he said, over a man's head and shoulders.

The plank was crossed without mishap, and then we followed the stepping-stones across the remaining portion of the dry river-bed, till we reached the wooded bank on the farther side. The air was laden with the fragrant perfume of the pines, of which the forest was composed, and their branches sheltered us from the mid-day sun. The gloom, however, of the narrow path we took oppressed me, and, without knowing why, I began to entertain a vague misgiving.

After we had advanced about three-quarters of a mile into the forest, the darkness increasing as we went, we came to a point where the path forked into two branches, one curving sharply round to the left, and the other bearing to the right. Our guide halted and appeared to be in doubt. At length he said :

"It is some years, señor, since I have been this way. From the beginning of the war I have avoided it, as the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

castle belongs to a Chilian in favor of the old régime. I do not remember two paths meeting at this point. One of them has, perhaps, been made since I was here last, but I think that the path which leads to the left is the one we ought to take. I will go on by myself, and call to you if I am right."

I did not quite like the fellow's manner, and during this speech I watched him narrowly. The expression of his face, however, was unfathomable, and as to his eyes, they converged so terribly that I could not make up my mind with which of them he was regarding me. Accordingly, I bade him do as he suggested, adding that he must take one of my men with him, to bring him back in case his sense of locality should fail him altogether. He started at this remark, but almost instantaneously recovered his composure, and, saying, "Very good, señor," marched off, accompanied by a member of my party.

Glad of a rest after our morning's march, we sat down by the side of the path, and applied ourselves to the food which we carried with us. Rodrigo had secured for me before starting a cold roast fowl, and I now partook of it with a keen relish. The men chatted and joked as they ate their frugal meal, and our little party more resembled a picket of volunteers at a sham fight than a body of soldiers who at any time within the next hour might be engaged in desperate conflict for their lives.

Suddenly, in one of those unexpected silences that sometimes fall upon a group of noisy men, there echoed through the wood a cry that chilled me to the bone. I jumped to my feet and listened breathlessly, but it was not repeated. Some of the men had risen also, but one who still retained his seat upon the ground looked up at me and said :

"It was Tomas who called, señor!" (Tomas was the
116

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

man who had accompanied the guide.) "I should know it anywhere. It is his imitation of the Indian call."

It seemed to me like the cry of a man in imminent peril of his life. In any case, I determined to proceed, and gave the order to resume the march.

My small detachment were soon in their places, and we began to follow the path which turned towards the left. At the end of the curve a straight track lay before us, almost as far as the eye could reach, but there was no sign of the guide or his companion. My uneasiness increased, and, although I did my best to conceal this, I could not help accelerating my pace. On gaining at length the end of the straight track, it bore away to the right in another sharp curve.

Almost before I was aware of it, I emerged into a broad avenue, at the end of which, to my astonishment, stood a formidable castle. As I gazed at it in amazement, white puffs of smoke shot out from numerous loop-holes, and a flight of bullets whizzed around me. I was on the point of withdrawing under cover, when Rodrigo, who had followed me, touched my arm and pointed to an object lying at the side of the avenue, some thirty paces from me. It was the prostrate figure of a man, and from his clothes I recognized the member of my party who had accompanied the guide. In spite of the increasing fire, I went up to him, and found that he was dead.

Meanwhile my men were replying to the castle's fire from the cover of the trees on either side of the avenue. It was useless to expose myself any longer, and I rejoined my men. As I went, Rodrigo, who accompanied me, said :

"So, señor, it was all a well-laid trap."

"Why, Rodrigo?" I asked. "What do you mean?"

"Did you not see that his throat was cut, señor?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

That could not have been done by bullets from the castle. No, señor, the guide lured him there and murdered him in cold blood."

The truth began to dawn upon me. I had been fooled by the cross-eyed guide and his two simple, peasant-like companions. It was not an agreeable discovery to make, but I had no time to dwell upon it. All my energies were needed for the work immediately before me. The castle, so far from being a country-house with nothing more than a garden-wall to protect it, was strongly fortified and garrisoned. If the wings and the rear were as well defended as the front, the task of taking it with the small body of men at my command was clearly impossible. I determined to reconnoitre the building without delay.

Leaving Rodrigo in charge of the men, I crept round under cover of the trees towards the left wing of the castle. A circular tower stood at the corner, and its loop-holed walls commanded both the front and flank. The left wing was a fine structure and admirably arranged for purposes of defence. The gleam of musket-barrels shone in the narrow slits in the wall, and the face of a man could now and then be distinguished through them. Half-way down the block stood an archway secured with two solid wooden gates, as well guarded as the entrance in the front. Opposite to these gates another avenue ran through the wood, and I had to make a considerable détour to avoid observation while crossing it.

On reaching the other side of the avenue, and drawing near to the castle again, I found the left wing continued by some lower buildings, and finally by a well-built stone wall about fifteen feet in height, surrounding, presumably, a large court-yard. A similar wall ran at the rear, and the right wing resembled in all respects the left.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The only entrance at the rear was a small wooden door, protected by a loop-holed chamber built immediately above it.

I rejoined my men with a heavy heart. The mission on which I had been sent was evidently impossible to accomplish. In fact, I doubted if Major Beauchef and his hundred men, without suitable artillery, could have made any impression on the castle. My chief care now was to withdraw my small detachment without provoking pursuit by the superior numbers of the enemy.

Rodrigo reported that the fire from the castle had been very galling, and that, in spite of the shelter of the trees, three of our men were already wounded. I saw that a retreat must be effected without delay. With this in view, I found a spot which offered better protection than the one where we were stationed, and, occupying it with half my men, I ordered Rodrigo to withdraw with the rest, taking the wounded with him.

The full brunt of the fight now fell upon the diminished numbers which I had with me. For twenty minutes we kept the castle busy replying to our fire. In that time we had one man killed and two more badly wounded. Then, after a feint upon the left wing, we suddenly ceased firing and fell back towards the river.

Half the distance had been covered before we caught sight of the enemy following in pursuit of us. They came pouring down the narrow path in great numbers, and, when they saw how small my party was, they advanced still more eagerly, confident of overwhelming us. My men, however, maintained such a steady fire upon them from the cover of the trees on either side that they were obliged to leave the path and take shelter like ourselves. Engaged in a conflict of this character, we fell back slowly and steadily towards the river.

Its banks were almost reached, and I was hoping soon

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to put the water between us and our pursuers, when Rodrigo appeared at my side. I saw by his face that he had bad news.

"What is it, Rodrigo?" I asked.

"The plank by which we crossed the river has been removed, señor," he answered.

I remembered the two guides who had parted from us there, and I saw how cleverly the trap had been prepared.

"Go and see if you can find any place where the river can be forded," I replied.

"I have been along the bank, señor," said Rodrigo, "for some distance on either side of the spot where the plank stood, but found nothing that would do."

We had now gained the river-bed. I saw that we should soon be driven out of the shelter of the trees, and if we could not cross the water would be easily disposed of in the open space between them and the channel in the centre.

"We must get across somehow," I remarked.

Rodrigo shook his head.

"The current is too strong, señor. The best swimmer would be swept away and dashed against the rocks. But over yonder," he continued, pointing down the river, "I found a spot which twenty men could hold against a hundred."

I told him to take me to it, and we were soon scrambling over the large bowlders which formed the dry bed of the river. A couple of minutes' walk brought us to a little basin hollowed out in the rocks, and covered at the bottom with a fine white sand. It was semicircular in shape, the channel forming its diameter. The spot seemed specially adapted to receive my small detachment, and I was much pleased by its discovery.

Rejoining my men, I sent off the wounded first, while

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

the rest of us kept up a brisk fire to cover the movement. When the wounded had been safely deposited in the little fort, the remainder of the party retreated in detachments, till only Rodrigo, myself, and two others remained in the wood. Our diminished fire naturally encouraged the enemy, who pressed on till their foremost men were only eighty yards from us. We could hold our ground no longer, and I gave the order to fall back.

That retreat over the uneven river-bed, where we were fully exposed to the enemy's fire, was a trying ordeal. Before we had covered thirty yards one of the two men accompanying Rodrigo and myself had fallen with a bullet through his head. Our own party were unable to help us, as we were in the line of fire between them and the enemy. To preserve the appearance of an orderly retreat we stopped every now and then and fired a volley. I had seized the musket and cartridge-pouch of the man who had fallen and joined my two companions in their fire. When we were only fifty yards from our little fort, the other man with us was wounded in the leg, and Rodrigo and I stopped firing in order to carry him the remaining distance. On this the enemy's fire redoubled, and Rodrigo's water-flask was shot away from his belt, but we succeeded in reaching our retreat in safety.

I now had a short breathing-space in which to take stock of the condition of my little force. Out of the twenty men with which I had left Osorno, I found that three were killed and five wounded, so that only twelve remained on the active list. We were, however, strongly entrenched. The crevices between the boulders formed excellent loop-holes for our muskets, and the uneven surface of the river-bed, which lay between us and the wood, made a successful attack on the enemy's part extremely difficult. A few of their men, indeed, led by an

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

energetic sergeant, ventured out into the open, but the death of their leader soon caused them to retire to the cover of the woods again.

Although we had succeeded in holding them at bay, our position was none the less desperate. The sun was sinking low on the horizon, and our men were exhausted by the unceasing conflict with superior numbers. No provisions remained to us, and ammunition was running short. Under the most favorable conditions, we could not expect to hold our own for many hours longer. Would it not be best to attempt to escape as soon as it was dark, instead of maintaining our position on the chance of fortune befriending us on the following day?

Within half an hour circumstances had decided the question for me. Just as the sun was setting Rodrigo called my attention to some figures issuing from the wood about a mile below us. We soon discovered that they were carrying a long piece of timber, and their intention at once became evident. They were going to cross the river and attack us in our rear. On that side we were defenceless, for our little fortress was commanded by the opposite bank. It now became imperative to withdraw from our position as soon as it was dark. However perilous the undertaking, there existed no alternative. Of the five wounded men, three had to be carried, thus reducing my fighting line from twelve to six. The enemy's pickets extended for some distance along the river bank, and if a false step or careless exclamation betrayed our presence we should be immediately surrounded and cut down. But there was no other course open, and at dark our march commenced.

The moon had not yet risen, and in the uncertain light of the stars we followed as best we could the course of the narrow channel. The ground was difficult enough to pick one's way across even when wholly unencum-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

bered, but to those who were carrying their wounded companions it proved arduous in the extreme. Time after time, when one of the carriers slipped beneath his burden, and an involuntary groan was extracted from the wounded man, I halted the party, listening eagerly to hear if our presence had been discovered. Once, indeed, when one of the men fell, dropping his musket with a loud clatter on the rocks, a challenge rang out from an enemy's picket stationed on the edge of the wood. But the complete silence which followed lulled their suspicions, and the challenge was not repeated. The guard they kept, in truth, was not a strict one. Here and there within the wood the light of a picket fire shone forth, displaying a group of soldiers seated comfortably around it. They evidently thought that our escape was impossible, and that they need only wait till the outflanking party had carried out their movement to rise up and make an end of us.

At length, to my great relief, we passed safely beyond the last of the enemy's pickets, but I soon found that our difficulties were by no means over. Although we were going up-stream, the water in the channel remained as deep and dangerous as before. As long as we were unable to cross the river, so long did we remain practically within the enemy's power. The outflanking party must soon discover our departure, and the alarm which they would raise would put their comrades on our track. At my wits' ends for a means of escape from our dilemma, a project suggested itself to my brain, and, hazardous though it was, I determined to adopt it.

My first care was to find a shelter for the wounded, and, entering the wood, I caused them to be deposited in a little nook surrounded by thick undergrowth. Then, leaving three of my able-bodied men in charge of them, I set out with the remaining nine.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Although I gave no explanation of my project, the men followed me without a murmur. Guided by my pocket-compass, to consult which I had frequently to use my tinder-box, I made my way through the dense forest. It was hard work, for thickets and close undergrowth impeded our progress, but three-quarters of an hour after leaving the bank we entered an avenue, at the end of which the castle lights were visible, and my project was revealed to all. Rodrigo, who had been walking behind me, now drew up at my side and said, respectfully,

“Is it a second attempt upon the castle that señor is intending?”

“Yes, Rodrigo,” I answered. “Is not the undertaking to your liking?”

“I am ready to follow wherever the señor leads me!”

I had been half afraid that Rodrigo would expostulate on the foolhardiness of my project, but I ought to have known him better. I verily believe that he would have accompanied me single-handed against the strongest fort in Chile if I had been disposed to lead him. His answer pleased me, and I said :

“In desperate circumstances, Rodrigo, the course which appears the most hazardous is often both the wisest and the safest, and in the present instance we cannot be worse off here than if we had remained on the river-bank.”

Rodrigo made no answer, but I had learned from experience that his silence often carried more approval than other men’s words.

CHAPTER XI

ON nearing the end of the avenue, which led, I found, to the left wing of the castle, I once more took to the wood, in order to escape observation as we made our way to the rear, where I thought we stood the best chance of effecting an entrance. On reaching it I halted the men and crept out to the edge of the trees, in order to reconnoitre the position. The small door in the centre of the wall was closed, but I saw no sentries on guard, nor any sign of life in the loop-holes of the chamber immediately above it. I thought it probable that the whole force, with the exception of a few men, who would in any case be left on duty in the castle, were down at the river-side, collected there for our intended capture. If an entrance could only be gained, I felt convinced that the building was ours, and, so strong were its defences, my small party would easily be able to hold it till troops should be sent from Valdivia to relieve us.

I was about to cross the open space and inspect the door to see if there were any means of forcing it, when it suddenly opened and a soldier passed out. The door was closed behind him, but I had caught a glimpse of a large, ill-lighted, and apparently deserted court-yard beyond it. The sound of bolts being shot home as the soldier walked away removed any hopes I had entertained of effecting an easy entrance. One other chance remained. Stealing softly back to my small detachment, I beckoned to Rodrigo and another man to follow me, and led the way as quietly as possible towards a foot-path

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

through the wood, which the soldier was about to enter. On reaching it I drew my sword, and, lying concealed behind a thicket, awaited the man's approach.

He came towards us with a confident gait, his musket shouldered, and its bayonet gleaming softly in the pale starlight, while his cartridge-pouch and water-flask flapped noisily at his belt. The presence of an enemy was far from his thoughts, for he was humming snatches of a Spanish love-song as he strode on with fearless step. A moment later my sword was pointed at his heart, while my followers held him firmly pinioned by the arms.

"Not a sound!" I said, as I moved the steel still nearer to him. "Do as I bid you, or you will never live to do another's bidding!"

The man met my gaze bravely, but knew that he was helpless.

"What is it, señor, that you wish me to do?" he asked.

"Return with us to the door from which you have just come, and give the password, so that it may be opened again."

The man reflected a moment, and then answered:

"Very good, señor!"

After the brave way in which he had met my threat, I was somewhat surprised at his consenting to my demand so readily. Subsequent events, however, explained his acquiescence. After disarming him, we led him back to the spot where the rest of my men were stationed, and then, bidding them follow us, we made our way as quietly as possible towards the door. On reaching it I placed Rodrigo and four men in a line along the wall on one side of it, and I took my stand with the rest on the other side. Then I gave our prisoner the signal, levelling my pistol at his head in case he played us false.

Such, however, did not appear to be his intention. In answer to his knock some one approached the door from

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

within, and, on receiving the password, undid the bolts. No sooner had the latch been lifted than I rushed against the door, forcing it open with my weight. After stumbling over the prostrate figure of the man who opened it, I entered the ill-lighted court-yard of which I had previously obtained a glimpse. Only two men were here—either servants or soldiers in undress uniform—and on seeing us they fled precipitately through a door leading to a passage on the farther side of the yard. We hurried after them in full pursuit. Although they had closed the door behind them, they did not possess sufficient resolution to bolt it against us, for on lifting the latch it opened to us. The passage which followed was a long one shut in by another door. I sped along it as fast as I could, to prevent it also being fastened against us. I was too late, however, and found it firmly secured from the other side.

Every moment was of importance, and, taking a musket from one of the men, I burst a panel open with the butt end. Then, slipping in my hand, I drew the bolts, and our progress was once more unimpeded. But at this moment occurred the accident to which I attributed my failure to take possession of the castle. One of my men, in his eagerness to follow me, stumbled over a piece of wood which had been left in the passage, and as he fell his musket went off. The report echoed throughout the building, and served the purpose of an alarm gun. By the time we had picked the man up, I could hear the sound of hurrying feet, and I entered a well-lighted court-yard at one corner, only to see a stream of soldiers issuing against me from the other. I now understood why my prisoner showed so little reluctance to give us admittance to the castle. In spite of those encamped by the river, there were sufficient left in the building to repel five times the number of my small party.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The engagement which followed was sharp and decisive. The first volley of the enemy struck down three out of the six men who accompanied me, for I had ordered Rodrigo with two others to guard the entrance door and prevent any one going either in or out.

The remaining three followed me in a hopeless charge against our opponents, and how they fared I never knew, for I have no recollection of what happened to us. My memory does not serve me till, on coming to my senses, I found myself stretched on a bench in a corridor with a dozen men around me.

"Why dress his wounds, doctor?" asked a voice that seemed familiar to me. "If he recovers, he will certainly be shot to-morrow morning."

As the man spoke, I could feel a skilful hand cutting away the cloth round a wound on my left arm.

"You cannot shoot a man," answered the doctor, "who has not strength enough to stand upon his feet."

"Then we must shoot him sitting down!" replied the other.

His tone, more than his words, roused me, and, looking up, I recognized the cross-eyed guide who had entrapped us so successfully. He was dressed in a sergeant's uniform, having apparently adopted the peasant's costume to carry out the part which he had played. On seeing that I recognized him, he smiled grimly.

"So, señor, you found the stream too deep for you! I said that it was well above a man's head and shoulders, and when the plank was lost, of course you could not cross it. However, we are indebted to that accident for the pleasure of having you as a guest in Monzana Castle—for one night at least!"

His terrible leer and the recollection of his treachery sent the blood surging to my brain. I was too weak to move, but I had strength enough to answer:

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"You shall pay for your villany some day, though I may not live to see it. Shoot me to-morrow, or even tonight, if you will, but there are those who will avenge my death."

At these words he broke out into a coarse laugh, which the others were taking up, when a step could be heard along the corridor, and silence fell upon the group.

"What have you here, sergeant?" asked the newcomer.

In spite of my exhausted state, I started. The voice was that of Don Guido Villamil.

"It is the leader of the band of rebels, señor," the sergeant answered, "who attacked the castle this afternoon."

"But they are down on the river-bank, hemmed in by our men. I have just returned from there."

"This is their leader, at any rate, señor. I ought to know, for I acted as his guide."

"Let me see him!" returned Don Guido. The group parted and he drew near to me.

"It is Señor Wildash!" he exclaimed, involuntarily, as he recognized me.

"You have your revenge, Señor Villamil," I said. "This time it is I who am the prisoner."

A gleam of satisfaction lightened his eyes as he realized the fact.

"Yes, you are my prisoner," he answered, "and we shall be quits at last!" Then, turning to the doctor, he added, "Is the prisoner seriously hurt?"

"He has a bayonet thrust through the right forearm," the doctor said, "and a bad wound on the head from a clubbed rifle."

This, then, accounted for my unconsciousness, and also for a strange swimming which I experienced in my head.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Not dangerous, I suppose?" Don Guido asked.

"No, not dangerous—that is, with ordinary care."

"Take him to the cells, sergeant, and be careful with him. We do not want him to die—just yet!"

I heard the words, but hardly heeded them. In truth, I was so prostrated with my wounds that this allusion to my death did not distress me. I soon felt myself lifted into a litter, and under the conduct of the sergeant carried off along an endless series of lofty corridors.

In the course of this journey I heard, as in a dream, a young girl's voice :

"Whom are you taking there, Sergeant Miguel?" she asked.

"A prisoner, señorita!"

"Is he wounded? Let me see him!"

"Your pretty eyes, señorita, were never meant to see the sights of war."

Nevertheless, the man stopped, and I was roused from my half-unconscious state by a stifled cry. Opening my eyes, I found a young servant-girl looking earnestly into my face. Her features seemed familiar to me, but I was not equal to the effort of attempting to recall them, and closed my eyes again.

"What is it, señorita?" asked the sergeant, with a change of tone. "Do you know the prisoner?"

"Oh no, Miguel!" the girl answered, quickly. "I do not know him. But I was startled. He looks—he looks so ill!"

The sergeant grunted and gave the order to move on again.

After traversing still more corridors, the men halted, and I heard the sound of a door being unlocked. A minute later I was lifted on to a bed, and some one—I think it must have been the doctor—gave me a draught to drink, after which I remembered nothing.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

It may have been the next day, or it may have been a week later, that I found myself gazing with the listless apathy of a man recovering from a serious illness round the room in which I was confined. Its bare walls were whitewashed, and a small window, secured by iron bars, stood high up in the outer wall, so that a patch of blue sky could be seen through it. The mattress on my bed, though hard, was clean, and the plain wooden table and chair seemed to have been lately scrubbed. It was evident that I was being taken care of, and that, in Don Guido's words, which now came back to me, I was not meant to die—"just yet."

As I lay there, letting my thoughts wander as they pleased, the key was turned in the door, and Sergeant Miguel, accompanied by the doctor, entered. The latter, a young Spaniard with trim black beard and upright military bearing, approached and felt my pulse, asking me how I was. On hearing that I was in no pain, he said that it would be best for me to get up. Anxious to learn my fate, and fancying I detected sympathy in his expression, I asked him if he could tell me what was going to be done to me. He was about to answer, when Miguel took the words from his mouth.

"You will know in good time, señor," he said, roughly, "what is in store for you, but you will not learn any the sooner for asking. I am in charge of you, and no one, not even the doctor, can answer your questions."

The doctor frowned, and seemed on the point of making an angry retort. He controlled himself, however, and merely said :

"I am here to attend to your bodily wants, señor. Sergeant Miguel is doubtless responsible for your mind and soul!"

Then, after giving some instructions with regard to my

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

food, he withdrew, and, the sergeant following him, the door was once more locked upon me.

The process of getting on my clothes was a long one, for my left arm was in a sling, and I still felt very weak and dizzy. It was a relief, however, to be on my feet once more, and I persevered. When I had finished, Miguel brought me my breakfast, a simple meal consisting of boiled beans and bread, but welcome enough to one who had the appetite of a convalescent man.

The sergeant said nothing, either when he brought the breakfast or when he took it away, and I was left to indulge my own speculations with regard to the fate that was in store for me. With returning strength came a revival of the instinctive, animal revulsion against the prospect of death. Yet what could I expect? In this war between the mother-country and her colonies the feeling of animosity between the combatants was increased, if anything, by their consanguinity of blood. As often happens in the case of civil wars, there had arisen an intensity of hatred such as is seldom evoked between countries differing in race and creed. The killing of prisoners had occurred on both sides, and at the taking of Valdivia the patriots had shot, much to Lord Cochrane's disgust, two officers who had been captured. This was partly in reprisal for the case of those Chilian prisoners whom we found on the island of San Lorenzo when the admiral took possession of it. They had lain in chains so long that they were crippled for life, while the Spanish viceroy had himself indulged in the refined cruelty of keeping the captain for a whole year under sentence of death. With such instances before me, what treatment could I look for, especially when the man into whose power I had fallen added his personal enmity to the hatred engendered by the conflict?

Only one thing could save me from the fate to which I

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

felt myself doomed, though I dare hardly entertain the hope of it. It was possible that Major Beauchef, on hearing of the disaster which had befallen my party, might send a force to attack the castle. The probability of his doing so, however, was very small. He had not enough men to detach a force sufficiently strong to insure the capture of the castle. Osorno itself being abandoned, there was no strategical reason for taking possession of a post still farther from Valdivia. It seemed probable, too, that all my men had been either killed or taken prisoners, in which case he would receive no authentic account of the disaster. Finally, even supposing he learned on good authority that I was a prisoner in the castle, the detention of a single officer—and that an Englishman—was not sufficient reason for risking the safety of the whole of southern Chile.

The thought of my men's fate recalled Rodrigo to my mind, and I wondered what had happened to him. I knew that he would fight as long as he could stand, and this knowledge convinced me that the faithful boatswain had been slain. Of course, I could get no news regarding him. I only saw the sergeant and the doctor, and after the former's rebuke of me for asking questions it would be useless to try to get any information from him.

The days passed by and I rapidly regained my strength. The blow on my head gave me no further trouble, and the bayonet wound in my arm was almost healed, though I could not yet dispense with a sling. I was still visited by no one but the sergeant and the doctor. What surprised me most was that I saw and heard nothing of Don Guido Villamil. Had he forgotten my existence, or was he only waiting for me to fully recover my health before he decided what to do with me? I was soon to have an answer to this question.

One evening about nine o'clock I was surprised to re-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ceive a visit from Miguel. Hitherto, after he had brought my supper at six, I had seen nothing of him till the following morning. His appearance at this hour of the night excited my curiosity. There had been an unusual commotion in the castle in the early hours of the morning, succeeded by a profound stillness during the day, and ending in more noise and bustle shortly after sunset. The troops had evidently been taken out on an expedition, and had returned from it elated by victory or thrown into confusion by defeat. Perhaps a force was coming to my rescue, after all. It was just possible, indeed, that I might be set free in exchange for some Spanish officer taken prisoner by the patriots. I eagerly awaited an explanation of the sergeant's visit.

Miguel seemed to have divined the current of my thoughts, for his sour lips parted in a smile, and the glint of his small cross-set eyes became more elusive than ever.

"I shall win your gratitude, Señor Prisoner," he said—Miguel always addressed me by that title, though he must have heard Don Guido mention my name—"for I am the bearer of good news."

I could not conceal the satisfaction which the announcement gave me, and I answered:

"What is it, sergeant?"

"The Governor of the Castle, his Excellency Señor Don Guido Villamil, requests the honor of your company at dinner with him to-night."

My face fell, for I had been so buoyed up with hope that I should not have been surprised if I had been set free forthwith.

"His excellency dines late," I answered, testily; "I have already had my dinner."

"That was no doubt the reason," responded Miguel, with a hideous leer, "why he thought you would prefer to join him with the wine, instead of going through the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

whole repast with him. His excellency is waiting, Señor Prisoner."

I felt the blood rush tingling to my brow. What was this insult that he had prepared for me? After having feasted royally, did he wish to make his captive furnish amusement to his guests? I would not go! I would provoke the guard to fire on me and end my life. Of what account was life to me, if subjected to such indignities? But a sudden thought struck me. Before giving up my life, I might, at least, take something in exchange for it. Accordingly, when the sergeant, annoyed by my delay, cried, curtly, "Come, come! His excellency must not be kept waiting," I signified my readiness to go, and followed him out of the cell. Two private soldiers, who were on guard outside the door, fell in behind us, and we set out along the lofty corridors.

After many turnings, of which I lost the count, we passed through a large pair of folding-doors with glass panels, into what was evidently the private portion of the castle. Rich carpets in the passages which followed deadened the sound of our footsteps, and at length we reach a small door at which a sentry stood. A word from Mignel opened this door to us, and I found myself in a small anteroom, to which penetrated from an adjoining apartment the murmur of voices intermingled with light laughter. I was on the threshold of the dining-hall.

The sergeant halted us near a red baize door on the farther side of the room, at which another sentry was on guard, and, giving the countersign, passed through. The hum of voices which burst upon my ears as the door swung open was hushed as suddenly when it closed again, and there was an interval of waiting, at which, in my highly strung state, I fumed impatiently.

At length Miguel reappeared, and, holding open the door, beckoned to me to enter. I did so, followed closely

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

by the two men in charge of me. Down the centre of a magnificent dining-hall ran a table, at which were seated some twenty to thirty officers. But I had not covered half the intervening space before I halted in amazement. For on Don Guido's right, dressed in deep black, with her eyes bent full upon me, sat Carita Montenar.

CHAPTER XII

"I SEE," Don Guido began, addressing me, "that your jailer has followed my instructions and treated you with care. The fare of Monanza Castle has certainly done you good!"

I did not answer. My purpose was not to lengthen the interview with a useless waste of words. Let him say what he had to say, and then I should know how to act. Meanwhile a brief glance at the table showed me that the señorita was the only lady present, and that there was no empty chair. What had become of her mother, Señora Montenar? Among the officers seated at one end of the table I recognized the youthful features of Don Luis Martinez. He was gazing on the table-cloth in front of him, with a sulky expression on his handsome face.

Don Guido did not like my silence.

"You show little gratitude, señor," he resumed, in biting accents, "for the kind treatment which you have met at my hands. You make an attempt upon the castle when you think there are none but old men and women to defend it, and, when you are taken prisoner, instead of being shot, your wounds are dressed by a skilful surgeon, you are given a clean, well-lighted room and plenty to eat; and yet you make no acknowledgment."

"You were my prisoner once, Señor Villamil," I answered. "The English do not shoot their prisoners!"

"But the Chilians do!" retorted the Spaniard, hotly. "Only three weeks ago two of my brother officers were

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

murdered in cold blood, after they had laid down their arms."

He was referring to the men who had been put to death after the capture of Valdivia.

"I knew nothing of it at the time," I answered.

"But you are fighting on the Chilian side, and incur a share of the responsibility for the barbarities they commit."

His argument was specious enough, and I saw that he meant to make the most of it.

"His excellency," I replied, with an ironic inflection of voice in pronouncing the title, "need not have called me from my cell to read me a lecture on international law in the presence of his guests. But if this is supposed to be a military trial, as he appears to be judge as well as prosecutor, he may take my defence as already spoken and proceed to give sentence."

Don Guido leaped from his chair, consumed with rage, and strode towards me, his hand on the hilt of his sword. In spite of the restraint which he had hitherto contrived to keep upon his words, it was evident that the wine and my presence had inflamed his passion almost beyond control.

"Yes, señor!" he cried, "I will proceed to give sentence—a sentence that will make your mocking tongue lie still forever. You have thwarted me successfully on three occasions in my life, but my turn has come at last. You will be shot at dawn to-morrow morning."

I could have expected nothing else from Don Guido Villamil. With the revengeful character too often found in those of Spanish blood, he was not likely to let pass an opportunity of getting rid of his enemy. As I had not been fortunate enough to settle our differences in open combat, there was no alternative, now that I was in his power, but to accept my fate. The manner, however, in

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

which he gloated on my helplessness, as, with hand upon his sword and one of his men on either side of me, he glared at me with burning hatred in his look, almost tempted me to execute the plan I had conceived before I left my cell—namely, to seize a weapon and strike my enemy a blow before I fell. The unexpected presence of Caritá Montenar foiled my design—for we could not fight before her—and I was submitting in silence to my sentence when the señorita rose hastily from her seat and moved towards a door at the end of the room. When she had gone a few paces she stopped, and turned on Don Guido Villamil with flaming eyes.

“I little expected, Señor Villamil, that you would subject a lady to such a scene when sitting at your table as a guest. But now that I have been made an unwilling witness of your method of administering justice, I cannot go without uttering my protest against it. Surely war is dreadful enough without these cruel reprisals!”

A slight murmur of approval ran round the table, though it ended abruptly under Don Guido’s angry glare. The men were all officers, and there was no doubt of the respect with which their chief inspired them. Young Don Luis alone held up his head and glanced from his cousin to Don Guido with flushed cheeks and a dangerous gleam in his eye.

“Would you have me set him free, señorita?” Don Guido asked, turning and facing her with his cruel smile. “If you wish success to the arms of Spain you would not say so, for this man and his chief, the English admiral, have worked us more harm than the Chilians, with twice their numbers, could have effected by themselves.”

“God knows,” she answered, “that the Spanish cause is foremost in my heart. Have I not made many sacrifices for it? But this is a matter of justice between man and man. When you were his prisoner, he did not take

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

your life, and I can speak from my own experience of his humanity towards a captured crew."

Don Guido's face grew dark. He did not relish these words of commendation from her lips.

"No doubt, señorita, the prisoner treated you with consideration when you were on board the prize he captured. Englishmen are gallant enough towards ladies, especially the young ones, and I am not surprised that his bearing found favor in your eyes. But I am always ready to listen when the señorita pleads. Sergeant, take the prisoner away! His sentence is revoked—for the present at any rate," he added, in an undertone, only audible to myself and the two soldiers at my side.

I felt relieved that the scene was over, not on my own account—for I had no hope that the penalty of death would be removed—but for the señorita's sake, who, by urging the cause of humanity, was only exposing herself to the shafts of Don Guido's heartless satire. I had watched, too, young Don Luis's face during the dialogue between the Spaniard and his cousin, and noticed once or twice that he had clapped his hand upon his sword and half risen in his seat, as though about to make an active protest on her behalf. The friendship between the two men had evidently undergone a change since those days in the "Fonda del Héspero," when Don Guido had won such complete ascendancy over his young acquaintance. I was curious to know in what relation these three stood to one another, and why Señora Montenar was not there to watch over her daughter's interests.

Many other questions presented themselves to my mind, as I pondered over the matter in the solitude of my cell. How was it, for instance, that Don Guido, a naval officer, had been appointed governor of the castle, with a large number of soldiers and military officers at

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

his command? Had he abandoned the naval profession, and did he owe his present post to the influence he possessed? It was true that he still wore his naval uniform, but his officers evinced a respect for him which they would only render to an officially authorized superior. Finally, how did Don Luis Martinez and Carita Montenar come to be there? But there was little use in vexing my head with these questions, for I saw no chance of obtaining answers to them.

The following morning the doctor visited me, and after inspecting my arm pronounced it to be sufficiently healed to dispense with the sling. In the evening, Miguel made his appearance about the same hour as on the previous day.

"I am going to disturb you once more, Señor Prisoner," he said; "but this time your visit will not be to such pleasant quarters."

I could not tell if he were speaking in earnest or in jest. He had congratulated me the day before when I was about to undergo a trying ordeal; he might now be condoling with me when a piece of good-fortune was really at hand.

"Where are you going to take me?" I asked.

"It will not be long before you see, señor. Come, all is ready."

I followed him out of my cell into the corridor, where two soldiers were waiting as before. This time Miguel turned to the right towards the rear of the castle, instead of towards the front, and after traversing several long passages reached the inner court-yard, where I had been taken prisoner. A sudden suspicion seized me, and my heart stood still. Don Guido, unwilling, after his promise to the señorita, to have me executed in the usual way, was sending me out into the woods under the charge of two men, who, when we had walked a sufficient distance

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

from the castle, would suddenly attack and kill me, burying my body where there would be no chance of it ever being found. Well, I had faced death before, and I was not going to quail before it now. At any rate, I would strike a blow for freedom before my murderers effected their design.

On gaining the outer court-yard and marching towards the end where stood the door by which we had entered the castle, I made sure that my conjecture was right, but the sergeant now led the way to a low building in the left-hand corner. Unlocking one of the four doors which it possessed, he bade me enter, and I found myself in a narrow cell with dingy stone walls, a thin slit in the outer one serving as a window. The only piece of furniture was a bare wooden bench.

"These are your new quarters, Señor Prisoner," said Miguel, managing to fix one of his cross-set eyes upon me, while the other seemed to wander round the walls. "The change is not for the better, is it?"

"No," I answered, "but it will serve as long as I shall have occasion for it."

My answer puzzled him, and he began to think that I had already seen a means of escape. Accordingly, he tried the lock, inspected the slit in the wall, and examined every corner of the cell, without finding anything to justify such a suspicion. Evidently relieved, the fellow wished me a pleasant night, and, locking the door, left me in darkness, except for the scanty starlight which filtered through the narrow window.

I understood Don Guido's plan. He would, no doubt, obtain greater satisfaction by keeping me a prisoner in this miserable cell, with the sentence of death always hanging over me, than if he had caused me to be shot outright. I bitterly regretted that the Señorita Montenar had been in the dining-hall when I was summoned

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

there on the previous evening, since, but for her presence, I might at least have died with a weapon in my hand. As it was, I should lie here till my nerve was gone and my manhood sapped, only in the end to be dragged out and slaughtered like a trembling animal.

There was little rest for me that night on the hard wooden bench, with the cold wind—and the wind is very cold at night in southern Chile—whistling through the open slit. Miguel paid me only two visits on the following day, at eleven and six o'clock, when he brought my breakfast and my supper. Both meals were similar, a piece of dry bread and a bowl of water. Most of the bread I left untouched, but drank the water, for I was consumed with a fever of rebellion against my fate, and worn by an increasing but ever hopeless endeavor to plan some means of escape.

Three weeks, perhaps, had passed—in my despair I ceased to keep count of the days and nights—when one evening about eleven o'clock, as I lay on my bench in a state of dull torpor, I heard a slight rustling noise in the direction of the door. My solitary confinement in this small cell had quickened my perception of every sound in my vicinity, and I knew at once that it was one which I had not heard before. It was too regular for the rustle of a falling leaf, and lacked the scuffling noise of the feet of a mouse or rat scampering over the bare flagstones on the floor.

I rose from my bench. A moon in its second quarter was shining through the slit, and its rays revealed a small object at the bottom of the door. It proved to be a piece of paper folded like a note. With a sudden rush of hope I tore it open, and, with the aid of the moonlight, read as follows :

“Listen for three taps on the door to-morrow at midnight.”

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The note was unsigned, but I assumed the writer to be my friend and took heart accordingly. Since I had been confined to my present cell I had seen no one but the sergeant, and he hardly ever spoke a word to me. Thus I had been completely cut off from the outer world, and did not even know what was going on in the castle. The coming visit might, at any rate, furnish me with news, if it did nothing more.

I hardly slept at all that night, and the following day dragged on with exasperating slowness. When at length the sun had sunk, and my supper had been brought, I set myself to keep the appointed watch. The hours, as tolled by the castle clock, seemed separated by such long intervals that I was in constant fear that it had stopped. But midnight struck at last, and, after waiting what I thought must be at least another hour, three soft taps were given at the door. I answered with three similar signals, and then to my astonishment I heard a key turning softly in the lock. A moment later the door opened and a woman entered.

"It is Isabel, the señorita's maid!" I exclaimed, as the moonlight from the narrow window fell upon her face.

"Hush!" she answered, closing the door behind her, "the sergeant is not far distant."

"Have you come to set me free, Isabel?" I asked, in an excited whisper, for the sight of the door being opened by other hands than Miguel's had filled me with mad hope.

"No, señor, you cannot escape—not yet, at any rate," she added, seeing my bitter disappointment. "The walls of the court-yard are high, and you could not climb them even if you possessed your former strength. But now—" and she regarded me with a look of pity, "ah señor does not realize how weak he is!"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Miguel had not remarked on my appearance, but I now seemed to remember that he had once or twice regarded me with a half-contemptuous, half-pitying glance.

"Why do they not shoot me and have done with it?" I said, despairingly.

"While there is life there is hope, señor," Isabel replied. "You do not look so ill as when they carried you to your cell on the night of your capture."

The incident of the Chilian servant-girl stopping my bearers and remarking on my death-like appearance came back to me, but I had failed to recognize her then.

"They only cured my wounds in order to starve me to death," I answered.

"That reminds me, señor," she said, producing a basket from beneath her cloak, "knowing how ill you fared, I have brought a few things for you," and she placed upon my platter a portion of a cold roast fowl and some fresh bread-and-butter. As I fell upon the viands with the hunger of a man who for the past three weeks had tasted nothing but stale bread and water, she added some wine from a little flask to the water which still remained in my bowl, saying that it would be wiser in my weakened state to mix the two. At the time I was too busy with the food to think of drinking, but, when I had finished, a long draught of wine-and-water seemed to infuse me with new life.

"You have not yet told me, Isabel," I said, "why you and your mistress—for I suppose she knows of it—should show me this attention. The last time we met she was my prisoner."

"Yes, but you treated her well, señor, and that is why she cannot let you be ill-treated now."

Then, as she collected the fragments of my meal in a

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

napkin and replaced it in her basket, so as not to arouse my jailer's suspicions, she gave me a brief account of what had befallen her mistress since I parted with her at Constitución. It appeared that they soon got a ship to Valdivia, and on arriving there became the guests of the governor of the town. Don Guido Villamil had lost his frigate—in all probability it was the result of the breaking of her mast which happened during her encounter with the *Chacabuco*—and had obtained, through the influence he possessed, the post of commandant of Fort Yngles. After the taking of the forts, Don Guido joined the ladies at the governor's house, and on the following morning, as soon as it was known that Lord Cochrane had set out for the town, there was a general stampede for Osorno, whence the majority made their way to the sea in order to escape to the island of Chiloe. Don Guido, however, had been offered by the governor of Valdivia the command of the castle of Monzana, if he would hold it against the patriots, and he persuaded Don Luis and the ladies to accompany him. Here Señora Montenar died of a chill, contracted during the discomfort and alarm of the hurried flight from Valdivia. As for the señorita, she wished to return to Santiago, but she could not go unless Don Guido helped her, and he was always inventing excuses for not doing so.

There was much to occupy my thoughts in all this information, but at this moment I remembered Rodrigo, and asked if any of my men were prisoners in the castle. An answer in the negative crushed any hope I might have entertained of the boatswain's safety.

"You will not forget to come and see me again?" I said, as Isabel prepared to go.

"As soon as I can, señor; but I have to watch my opportunity. Miguel does not always sleep so heavily."

"But how did you contrive to get the key?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"It is a duplicate key which I found in the steward's room, where they are kept, and where I sometimes have occasion to go."

I could not but admire the skill she had shown in thus effecting an entrance to my cell, and was thanking her for the efforts she had made on my behalf, when I suddenly remembered the señorita's ring. I drew it from my pocket and held it out to her.

"Give this to your mistress. It belongs to her. I found it on board the prize ship after her departure."

Isabel glanced at it and gave a cry of surprise.

"The señorita will be greatly pleased to have it again, for she values it very highly."

A minute later the young girl slipped quietly out of the cell. I stretched myself on the wooden bench, and, wondering vaguely why the señorita set so high a value on the ring, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII

ONLY those who have been through a similar experience can realize the eagerness with which I looked forward to Isabel's next visit. When a man is confined to a cell some eight feet long by five feet wide, with no companion but his own thoughts, any incident which breaks the dull monotony of his existence is gladly welcomed. But Isabel's promise to come again was to me a matter of supreme importance, for the fact of being able to communicate with her meant that I need not despair altogether of escape. A friend within the prison walls is often worth a dozen friends outside of them.

The keen anxiety, then, with which I watched for her signal on the following night, and the disappointment I felt when none was given, will be easily understood. The next day a similar experience befell me, and, with the rapidity with which at the first check the hopes of one whose nerves are overstrung collapse, my sanguine expectations were changed into deep despair. Isabel must have been caught, I concluded, by the sergeant, as she was returning to the castle from my cell, and her possession of the duplicate key discovered. Or else, perhaps, only a passing whim had induced her to come and see me, and now that her curiosity was satisfied, she had forgotten all about me. Such were the thoughts to which my brain, unhinged by want of proper nourishment and healthful occupation, too readily gave way.

On the third night I sat on my wooden bench, and waited with a dull despair. The vigil was kept, not be-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

cause I expected any good to come of it, but because I could not sleep. The light of the moon streamed in through the slit in the wall, and I could hear the distant rustling of the wind amid the topmost branches of the trees around the castle. All else was still, except when at regular intervals of a quarter of an hour a sentry passed beneath the narrow window of my cell.

I must have dozed off as I sat, for I remember waking with a start in the midst of a dream. I fancied that I was once more captain of Señor Martinez's ship, sailing close inland along the coast of Chile. It was a lovely afternoon, and Rodrigo was showing me a green parrot which he had lately purchased and made exceedingly tame. I was watching it, with amusement, fluff out its feathers, put its head on one side, and wink appreciatively while Rodrigo whistled to it, when I suddenly awoke. Rodrigo's whistle was still echoing in my ears, and I was astonished at the vividness of my impression.

As I pondered over the dream the whistle sounded again, very softly but distinctly. I was broad awake now, and sprang to my feet, with every sense on the alert. Where did it come from? Could it possibly be Rodrigo, and, if so, was he a prisoner in the castle, after all? I listened eagerly, with a beating heart, for a repetition of the call. How many minutes elapsed I do not know, but I began to think that I was the victim of some strange hallucination, when once more the whistle sounded. There was no mistake about it at this time. It was nearer, and quite clear, and—most welcome point of all—it was outside the castle. I crept towards the slit and answered softly. In reply I heard the stealthy approach of footsteps through the long grass round the building.

"Is that you, señor?" asked a voice, which in spite of its low tones I had no difficulty in recognizing as Rodrigo's.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I am here, Rodrigo," I answered, clambering up sufficiently high into the window to catch a view of the faithful boatswain some four feet below me. "I thought you had been killed."

"I was wounded, señor, but escaped, how I will tell you later. We have only time now to talk about your freedom. Have you formed any plans of escape, señor, in which I can assist you?"

"I have a friend in the castle who possesses a duplicate key of my cell, but that will not help me to scale the high wall which encloses the court-yard."

"If I procured a rope, señor, you would be able to do it. Is your friend reliable?"

"Yes; but unless I could manage to elude the vigilance of my jailer inside the castle, as well as the sentry outside of it, her assistance would be of little use to me."

"Her assistance?" echoed Rodrigo, in evident disappointment. "It is a woman, then."

I remembered the boatswain's estimate of women, and hastened to reassure him on the point.

"It is Isabel, the maid of Señorita Montenar. The señorita is grateful to me for the treatment she received on board the prize, and sent Isabel with some food for me. The maid promised to come again."

"How long ago was that, señor?"

"Three days."

Rodrigo grunted disapprovingly, as if nothing else could be expected from a woman. As, however, the sentry was due to pass round again shortly, he only said:

"I will come again to-morrow night at the same time, señor, and you may depend on me to do my best to carry out any plan which you arrange."

I bade him adieu, and he withdrew swiftly to the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

cover of the wood, just in time to escape the observation of the sentry, who came on his round barely half a minute later.

Rodrigo's visit filled me with the highest hopes. Possessing a friend outside as well as inside the castle, I felt that freedom was within my reach. My brain was soon busy with a score of different schemes, and so absorbed did I become that three soft knocks at my door quite startled me, and a short time elapsed before I remembered their significance. On doing so, however, I at once returned the signal, after which the key was inserted as quietly as before, and the door opened.

"I had begun to give you up, Isabel," I said, as the dark figure before me closed the door behind her; "but I am very glad you have come, because—"

I stopped suddenly. The figure had turned round, and, with the moonlight full upon her face, I recognized Caritá Montenar.

"You are surprised to see me, señor," said the young girl, while the color mounted to her cheek, "but I wanted to thank you in person for the ring you have returned to me, for I set great store by it."

As she spoke I saw it flashing softly in the moonlight on the third finger of her left hand, with which she held her dress.

"I could not have done anything else, señorita," I replied. "I had noticed the ring on your hand when you were aboard the ship, and found it lying in the cabin after your departure."

"It is a family heirloom, señor, and has always gone to the eldest son. I am an only child, and my father gave it to me just before he died. He bade me take great care of it, for on the two occasions on which it had been lost misfortune had followed misfortune till it was restored again."

SEÑORITA MONTE NAR

"I am very glad, then, señorita," I said, "to have been the means of putting you once more in possession of your talisman. May it bring the good-luck which tradition has ascribed to it."

The young girl looked at the ring and sighed.

"I hope it may, señor; and if it is still faithful to its history it should reward the finder with good-fortune also. The first time it was lost, the peasant who restored it prospered so greatly that he became steward of the whole of my ancestor's estates. The second time, the finder was a young man of noble birth who had squandered all his fortune on the gambling-table, but who, shortly afterwards, broke himself of his vice and rose to be a famous statesman."

"What fate has it in store for me, señorita?" I asked. A smile must have lurked on my lips, I suppose, for she replied :

"Ah, señor, you are laughing at me; but I only told you these stories that you might make some allowance for superstition on the part of the owner of the ring, and understand why I was so anxious to thank you. If I had half the influence of any of its previous owners, I might be of service to you, but I can do nothing. Don Guido should, however, know better than to keep an English officer in a wretched cell like this;" and she glanced around her in evident revolt against his treatment of me.

I decided to take her into my confidence.

"It is well enough, señorita," I said, "for the short time that I still expect to occupy it."

Her large dark eyes were fixed upon me, questioningly.

"What do you mean, señor?" she asked. "It cannot be that you think Don Guido will—will break his word to me, and have you shot!"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"No, señorita, I was only expressing a hope that I should soon be able to effect my escape."

Her features lightened.

"Have you good reason to hope so?" she said. "It is true that we have a duplicate key to your cell, but there is still the high wall of the court-yard to keep you a prisoner."

"I think I see a way of overcoming that difficulty, since receiving a visit from a friend this evening about an hour before you came."

"Is there some one else in the castle, then, who is willing to assist you?"

"Not in the castle, señorita, but outside its walls. My friend is Rodrigo, the boatswain, who was with me on the night when I was captured, but who managed to escape. With his help, and a rope, I shall be able to climb the wall."

"Take care, señor, that everything is properly prepared before you make your effort. There is the sergeant here, as well as the sentry outside, to be reckoned with, and remember that if you happen to be caught you will certainly be shot."

"I must run the risk of that, señorita."

The young girl regarded me in silence for a space, and then her thoughts took a new direction.

"You are indeed much thinner, señor, than when I saw you last, three weeks ago. It is plain they have been starving you, and to-night I could only get you a little fruit."

She opened the basket which she held in her hand, and drew out a bunch of grapes.

"It is very kind of you, señorita, to take this trouble for me. You could not have brought a more welcome food."

"I see that it will be a long time before you are strong

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

enough to attempt to escape," the señorita continued. "Isabel shall help you as much as she can, but the greatest caution is necessary."

I assured her that I would be careful. I expected to see Rodrigo every night, and not only could we thus mature our plans, but he could furnish me with provisions, and relieve Isabel of the risk entailed by frequent visits. When everything was ready the señorita should be duly informed of our project.

"Good-bye, señor," she said, when I had finished, "and may you be successful; though," she added, with a faint smile, "I am not advancing the cause of Spain by conspiring to set free so brave an enemy of hers."

The moon shone full upon her, and lent her features a sweetness of expression I had never seen before. I bent over the hand she extended to me, and touched it with my lips.

"May your ring bring you the good-fortune it has already brought to me," I answered.

"I may soon have need of all its magic, señor," the young girl replied.

In the solitude of my cell, when she was gone, I pondered on her parting words. Did she mean that she herself was virtually a captive in the castle, and as eager to escape from it as I was? Isabel's account made this seem probable, yet it was hardly likely that Don Guido would refuse to let her go if she demanded it, especially when her cousin was at her side to see that her liberty was not infringed.

During the next two weeks the preparations for my escape went steadily on. Rodrigo kept me well supplied with nourishing food, and I regained my strength rapidly, hardening my muscles by every kind of exercise which could be practised in so confined a space. Meanwhile the faithful boatswain collected the materials for

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

the attempt in a hollow tree near to the side of the castle in which I was confined. They consisted of a stout rope some twenty yards in length, and a peasant's suit of clothes for me—Rodrigo was already clad in them—so that after my escape we should attract as little attention as possible. Finally, he put by a store of biscuits to take with us, in case we should have to hide in the woods for the first few days of my recovered freedom.

It was now that I learned, piece by piece—for the sentry did not give us an opportunity for prolonged conversations—the story of Rodrigo's escape and subsequent adventures. It seems that on the night of the attack upon the castle, when I had left him with two men to guard the gate, he remained at the post till the loud firing in the inner court showed that I was meeting with unexpected opposition. As he was on the point of disobeying orders, and coming to see if I needed assistance, half a dozen men rushed into the outer court, and their first volley brought him to the ground with a bullet through his leg. His two companions, in spite of his telling them to leave him alone and make a stand against the enemy, picked him up and ran with him to the shelter of the woods. A volley or two was fired after them, but no pursuit was made, a reinforcement of our troops being probably anticipated. As soon as Rodrigo thought they were secure from attack, he ordered a halt and bound up his wound—which was only a flesh wound—with his handkerchief. The march was then resumed, but the men soon lost their way, and the boatswain found the pain of being carried almost unendurable. Another halt was called, followed shortly by a second effort to continue the journey. This attempt also failed, and the three men sat down to wait for dawn.

With the first faint streaks of daylight, Rodrigo discovered that they were near a woodman's cottage, and

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

he bade his two companions go on by themselves while he would await the owner of the cottage and accept whatever treatment he would mete out to him. After some demur the two men went, and the woodman, finding Rodrigo on the ground when he set out to his work in the morning, took compassion on him, and carried him into the cottage. There he and his wife had nursed him till he had recovered from his wound, and there he was still allowed to remain. Rodrigo assisted his protector in his daily work, and by little presents which he bought at Osorno—for they would take no money—attempted to repay them for their kindness. It was at this town that he had purchased the materials for my escape.

Everything was progressing favorably, and I was hoping in a day or two to arrange a definite night for the attempt, when circumstances arose which made immediate action necessary. As I was sitting on my bench one afternoon, listening to the soft cooing of the doves in the neighboring wood, and waiting for the long hours to pass by before I should be able to converse again with my faithful follower, I heard some one calling for the sergeant, and demanding in angry accents to be taken to the cell in which the Englishman was confined. I recognized Don Guido's voice, and from its tone boded no good of the coming interview.

The sergeant's step could soon be heard, hurrying along with the jangling keys, the door was thrown open, and Don Guido entered.

"You can close the door and wait outside," he said to Miguel.

The door was closed and we stood facing each other, for I had risen from my bench. Don Guido's face was white, and there was a malevolent expression in his eye.

"You seem destined to be always thwarting me, señor!"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

he exclaimed. "Fortunately it is in my power to prevent you ever doing it again."

His speech took me completely by surprise. Had he, then, heard of my projected escape? I controlled myself as well as I could, and answered:

"Seeing our relative positions, señor—you the governor and I a prisoner in Monzana Castle—it is strange that I should be accused of thwarting you."

He stamped his foot and glared at me savagely.

"If I bound you hand and foot, and had you gagged, I am convinced that you would still find a way to undermine my plans. Your very presence near me seems sufficient for the purpose. What have you done, I wonder, to make the señorita champion your cause so warmly?"

I felt a certain relief at these words. He evidently had not discovered about her visit to me, or he would have stated his grievance in much more definite terms.

"As you are doubtless aware," I answered, "I have been confined to this cell for three weeks, with no one to speak to but the sergeant, who never makes reply. How, then, can I be accused of interfering with any plans of yours?"

He stared at me for a time without opening his lips. Then he broke out again:

"I suppose it was on board your prize that you worked yourself into her favor. It was foolish of me to send for you that night, while she was at the table. Still more foolish was it to grant the request she made."

Had he come to threaten me with death again? His bitter tongue provoked my gall.

"You cannot regret it more than I do, señor. I should at least have been spared another interview with you!"

He made a quick step towards me and laid his hand upon his sword. I saw the action, and stood facing him with folded arms.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Yes, Don Guido, strike and kill me, as I stand unarmed before you. It will be another proof of your generous and gallant character."

He drew away his hand from the hilt of his sword with an impatient gesture, and replied :

"I will not soil my hands with spilling a villain's blood ; it is only fit to be shed by the bullets of my followers. The señorita's advocacy will avail you nothing. I granted her prayer once, wishing to see how much she would sacrifice on your behalf. But I find it is only a few fine words ; and when you are dead there will be one point less on which she and I will disagree. You will be shot at dawn to-morrow !"

"So be it, excellentissimo señor !" I answered, mockingly.

Don Guido turned on his heel and left me, and my prison door was once more closed upon me. I paced up and down my cell in a frenzy of impotent rage. If I had only been armed and we could have fought out our quarrel then and there to the bitter end ! What had driven him to this crowning act of insult ? As the late interview passed again before my mental vision, I remembered his words that he had granted the señorita's request in order to see how much she would be willing to sacrifice on my behalf. He had evidently made use of his power of life and death over me to try and extract some promise from her, it might be the promise of her hand. I was glad he had been foiled, even though I had to suffer for it. Death comes to all sooner or later, and if any conjectures were true, it was some satisfaction to think that I should not be the cause of the señorita being yoked for life to a villain like Don Guido.

But I did not yet despair of escaping from the fate prepared for me. There was still the whole night in which to make an attempt to gain my freedom. It is true that

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

no definite plan had been arranged, but everything was ready. I was sure to see Rodrigo at midnight, when we could decide on the best hour for the enterprise.

But now a sudden thought dashed my hopes to the ground at one blow. Isabel was not to visit me till the following night. In order to avoid the risk of detection as much as possible, I had arranged that she should come only every other day, when I could tell her how our plans progressed. She had been to my cell the previous evening, and so would not come again to-night. Without her there was no chance of effecting my escape.

I sank on my bench overwhelmed with the conviction of my helplessness. Only the previous day Isabel had asked me whether I had not better keep the key myself, and I replied that it would not be wise to do so, as Miguel frequently searched the cell. I proposed, however, to take it from her the next time she came to me, and give it into Rodrigo's custody. I was unable to do so then, as he had just gone off. Thus the lapse of a few minutes had meant the difference between life and death to me. Truly we are all the sport of fortune, and on her caprice depends whether we reach a good old age or die a violent and untimely death.

CHAPTER XIV

How long I sat there, stunned by the hopelessness of my position, I could not tell, but I remember Miguel found me in the same posture when he brought my frugal supper at six o'clock. I took no notice of him when he entered, and probably for the very reason that he saw I wished to be left alone to my thoughts he at once began to talk to me.

"Senor Prisoner seems to have lost his appetite," he said. "Did his excellency bring bad news?"

I did not answer nor even look at him. I knew from his tone that he was acquainted with the sentence, and I could not trust myself to meet with composure the hideous leer of his cross-set eyes.

"Senor Prisoner should allow nothing to interfere with his meals, good wholesome bread and the best spring water. What can a man want more than that?"

Would the jabbering idiot never cease his foolish prattle? My interview with the master had been enough for my endurance, without having to put up with mockery from the servant.

"Senor has lost his tongue," Miguel continued, in tones which showed that my silence had at length begun to nettle him. "Yet I am sorry that he will not speak to me to-night, for I may never hear his voice again!"

I sprang to my feet and hurled at his head the earthenware platter on which he brought my bread. He ducked and fled precipitately, while the platter broke into a thousand fragments against the wall.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"To-morrow at dawn," he hissed through the keyhole, after hastily locking the door, "I will kick thy lifeless carcass for this insult!"

I almost regretted now that I had not seized the fellow by the throat and strangled him, though it would have ended in my being shot at once instead of having twelve more hours to live. In that case, too, I should not have seen Rodrigo again, which I was very anxious to do, although I knew it would be impossible to arrange for my escape.

It was a dark night, and through my narrow window I could not even see the trees through which the wind was whistling ominously. Rodrigo tarried later than usual. The castle clock tolled midnight and one o'clock, and still he did not come. When three o'clock sounded I gave up all hope, and began to idly speculate at what hour it was dawn. The time seemed to be drawing close, when Rodrigo's whistle sounded beneath the window. I rose and answered it.

"I am late to-night, señor," he said, "but I have been to Osorno, and lost my way in the dark as I came back. I have now got everything we want, and a night can be fixed for your escape as soon as you think fit."

Fate seemed bent on mocking me.

"It is too late, Rodrigo," I answered, "for I am sentenced to be shot at dawn."

"Sentenced to be shot at dawn?" repeated Rodrigo, in amazement. "Then, señor, there is not a moment to be lost. I will go and get the rope—"

"It is useless," I broke in, "for I have no means of escaping from my cell."

"Has the señorita's maid failed you, then?" he asked, quickly.

"She was not to come again till to-morrow night," I answered.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Rodrigo was dumb. He had realized the hopelessness of my position. His silence brought it home to me more vividly than words. At length he said :

"Can you tell me in what part of the castle the señorita lies? I will attempt to rouse her."

"I do not know, and even if I did you could do nothing but bring the sentries down upon you. Besides, the sky seems to be already lighter over there. It will soon be dawn."

The poor fellow groaned in his powerlessness to help me. His evident distress affected me.

"Courage, Rodrigo!" I said to him. "We have braved death together many times, and I am not afraid to face it by myself. You must make your way back to Valdivia as soon as you can, or you, too, will fall into Don Guido's hands."

"And what care I?" he answered, passionately. "If he shoots you, he may shoot me also. In truth, he shall do it first, for I will wake him with a bullet through his window."

My faithful follower's devotion touched my heart, but I could not suffer him to talk in such a strain.

"Your first duty is to your country, Rodrigo, and you may live to do her many years' good service yet. Hush! I hear the sentry. Come back again when he is gone."

Rodrigo withdrew to the cover of the trees, and I sat down upon my bench once more. It was useless, I decided, to prolong the interview beyond the next interval between the sentry's rounds. Rodrigo would only be needlessly exposed to the chances of discovery. I would give him a few instructions with regard to the personal effects I left at Valdivia, and then bid him farewell. Having come to this decision I felt calmer. As long as there is hope, so long exists a feverish anxiety to live.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

But when death becomes inevitable, the mind awaits it as a welcome relief to the preceding torment of suspense.

As I sat there with more peace at my heart than I had known since my captivity, I fancied I heard three faint taps at the door. Was it only my imagination, threatening to destroy my newly won composure? I did not move; but the three taps were soon repeated, and I ran to answer them, with mad hope once more surging to my brain.

"Quick, señor!" said the señorita, who entered at my signal. "There is not a moment to be lost. Is Rodrigo there?"

"He will return at once, señorita, for the sentry has passed by."

"Has he the rope ready?"

"It is in a hollow tree close by. I will send him for it;" and his whistle sounding at this moment, I told him to run and fetch the rope, as the door of my cell had been unlocked.

"I was afraid that I should never get here," said the señorita. "Don Guido told me in the afternoon that he would have you shot this morning, and I knew that you had not yet arranged a plan for your escape. I meant to come to you at midnight, but I found a sentry guarding the exit from the castle. For three hours Isabel and myself watched him in turns, and he never ceased pacing to and fro. After three o'clock, however, he began to tire. They had forgotten to relieve him, and at length, from fatigue and the unaccustomed warmth of the house, he sank upon a bench and fell asleep. That was my opportunity."

"You have risked too much already in my behalf, señorita," I said, "and yet you decide to risk still more. Supposing that I effect my escape, and the sentry is awake on your return? Don Guido will know whom to thank for giving me my freedom."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"The man sleeps soundly; and even if I should be seen, I care not what Don Guido thinks of it."

I was not so easy in my mind upon the point.

"Don Guido has unchecked power in the castle, and he could do you mischief if he chose."

"He dare not do so!" rejoined the señorita, drawing herself up. "Besides, there is always my cousin Luis to protect me."

I had not much confidence in Don Luis's power of protection, but I could not press the matter further. The señorita was too proud to confess to any fear of the despot of the castle; and Rodrigo now arriving with the rope put an end to the conversation. The boatswain and I had already decided that the best place to scale the wall was in the clear space between my cell and the guard-room, where Miguel kept his watch. Accordingly, the señorita and myself stepped softly from the cell, and made our way towards this spot. The night was still dark, but my eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, and as we approached the wall I saw that Rodrigo had already thrown the rope. I made the end fast to a ring-bolt in the wall, asking the señorita to set it loose again when I had reached the other side, so as to leave no trace of my escape.

I had scarcely done this when a loud yawn came from the direction of the guard-room, and there was a sound of some one rising to his feet. Miguel had apparently awakened just in time to discover my attempt.

"Quick, Señor Wildash, quick!" murmured the señorita, laying her hand upon my arm. "You still have time if you ascend at once."

"And allow Miguel to discover that it was you who helped me to escape? No, señorita, I will not let him do that if I can help it."

The sound of heavy footsteps could now be heard mov-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ing towards the guard-room door. The señorita shrank back in terror, and her grasp tightened on my arm. "Ah! why did you not go while it was still possible? Now it is too late, and you will be caught and shot!"

Were her words prompted by something more than a generous desire to assist in the escape of a man who was condemned to die? I could not tell, and had no time to think, for the steps were nearing the door, and immediate action must be taken. Just before Miguel had been roused, my foot had struck against something hard upon the ground. I now stooped down and found it to be the heavy wooden leg of a discarded stool. Motioning to the señorita to remain quite still, I crept silently towards the guard-room door, which faced the centre of the courtyard.

Miguel reached the door about the same time as myself, though I was hidden by the side wall of the building along which I moved. On reaching the door the sergeant halted, and I could hear him muttering to himself:

"Only four o'clock! Another hour, at least, before I can call out the men to shoot that English dog. Well, the laugh will be on my side when he falls with a dozen bullets through his breast, and I have kicked the last breath out of his hateful body."

Here he stopped and chuckled softly to himself. I bided my time, knowing that I could do nothing till he moved without the threshold. He soon continued talking to himself:

"But it was a curious dream that roused me from my sleep just now. What can have put the idea into my head? I can still see myself opening the door of the cell, and finding my bird had flown. He would have to be a bird indeed to escape from his present quarters. Still, it would ease my mind to go and make sure that he is really there."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I grasped my heavy wooden weapon. The sergeant made a couple of steps, and fell a helpless bundle at my feet. I hastened back to where the señorita stood, her face buried in her hands.

"What have you done?" she asked.

"He is only stunned, señorita," I replied; "his thick skull would resist a far heavier blow than that. Still, he will not come to himself again till you have gained the house. If you lock the cell before you go, and tell Isabel to replace the key in the steward's room, Don Guido will be hard driven to find an explanation of my disappearance."

The señorita promised to do as I suggested, and once more urged me to be gone.

"Farewell, señorita," I said. "Some day I hope to be able to repay the kindness you have shown me."

"Farewell, Señor Wildash," she responded; "and may God preserve you from your enemies!"

I kissed the hand which she held out to me, and, giving Rodrigo the signal, began to climb the rope. The top of the wall was soon reached, and I let myself down on the farther side without mishap. The slackening of the rope showed the señorita that I had descended in safety; she let it go from the ring-bolt and we hauled it back over the wall. Then we stepped hastily across the open space into the shelter of the surrounding trees.

According to a plan which Rodrigo and I had roughly drawn up, we had arranged to strike out for the plank across the river, and get as far away from the castle as we could before dawn. In the short time now remaining before daylight this was impracticable; and Rodrigo said that he would find some place to hide me near the woodman's cottage. Our first visit, however, was to the hollow tree where our stores had been concealed. I quickly

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

changed the uniform in which I was dressed—the same as that in which I had been taken prisoner—for a peasant's dress similar to the one which Rodrigo wore. The coil of rope and my discarded clothes were hidden away within the tree; then, taking the pistols which the boatswain had the forethought to provide, we set out for the woodman's cottage.

On the way we discussed what kind of hiding-place would prove most secure against discovery by Don Guido's men. Rodrigo thought that some portion of the cottage itself, or of its outhouses, would be most likely to answer the purpose, as no suspicion would attach to a dependant of the castle, who lived at so small a distance from it. But I did not wish to expose the worthy couple who had befriended the boatswain to any further risks. They had done enough for one of us already, and I could not reconcile myself to imposing any more on their good-nature.

Rodrigo was then at his wit's end to suggest any other hiding-place. He knew of no cave or thicket which would be likely to escape the vigilant search of Don Guido's followers. We were still discussing the question when we reached the woodman's cottage. The first faint streaks of dawn were appearing in the east. In a quarter of an hour my escape would be discovered and the alarm raised. A decision must be arrived at without delay. We had halted in front of the cottage, and I glanced around me in despair of finding any other hiding-place. Then my eyes fell on an old tree of great girth, with branches forking out in all directions from the top of the trunk.

"That is where I shall go," I said, pointing to the tree.

Rodrigo shook his head.

"You could easily be seen, señor, by any one at a little distance from the tree."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I determined to try it, and, swinging myself up by some small branches growing on the trunk, I reached the spot from which the larger boughs projected. A hasty examination confirmed Rodrigo's opinion, and I saw that I should be visible at a short distance from the tree. I was just on the point of descending when my right foot slipped into a hole. I examined the place, and found to my intense relief that the top of the trunk was hollow. I told Rodrigo of the fact, and bade him bring me a pick-axe. In a few minutes I had scooped out from the rotten centre of the tree a hole big enough to conceal me entirely from the enemy, at whatever distance he might be.

"This cell is even smaller than my last, though much more welcome," I said to Rodrigo, as I dropped the pick-axe to the ground. The boatswain made no comment, but went off with the axe, evidently satisfied with the hiding-place which I had found.

The dawn which was to have been my last had come, and I was free!

CHAPTER XV

THE subject of freedom has employed a large number of pens, and great philosophers have evolved elaborate constitutions with the sole view of conferring this universally desired boon upon their fellow-creatures. But it is doubtful whether all that is connoted in the word has ever been experienced in the past, or will ever be attained to in the future. "To live in a state of exemption from the power or control of other persons," as the dictionary defines it, is a beautiful ideal, which it is impossible to realize. The most we can do is to change our masters, and the change is not always for the better. A republic has often proved more tyrannous than the worst of despots; while the sway of many absolute monarchs has been mild and beneficent in the extreme. Even slaves who have obtained their freedom will frequently return to their old masters, preferring the kindly despot who provided them with food to the hard measure of the world which would let them starve unless they worked unceasingly to gain their living.

I soon found that the freedom which I had been so elated to acquire was little more than a change in the place of my confinement; and though my new quarters were not so intolerable as to make me regret the old ones, yet I was as much a prisoner in the tree which I myself had chosen as in the cell which Don Guido had selected for me. The sun had scarcely risen, when from the castle, which was only some three or four hundred yards distant, came the sound of the alarm, the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

blowing of bugles and the ringing of bells, while a gun was fired to warn the neighborhood of a prisoner's escape.

These noises appeared to have aroused the owner of the cottage, for the door was presently unlatched, and a hale old man stepped out and listened to the din. He was soon joined by his wife, who asked what was the matter.

"A prisoner has escaped," he answered. "Did you not hear the gun? I hope he will not come this way. I do not want Don Guido's soldiers turning the cottage upsidedown."

The old woman reflected for a while and then said: "Do you think that Tomas has anything to do with his escape?" Tomas was the name by which Rodrigo was known to them.

"If he has, he shall not bring him here," the old man answered. "One of them is quite enough. Not that I have anything to say against Tomas, for we do not run much risk through him. He grew a beard while he was ill, and what with his clothes and his country manner, they would not easily suspect him. But the prisoner who has just escaped must be well known to his warders, and if he was caught here we should be ruined."

At this moment Rodrigo opened the door of the loft which had been assigned to him and descended the ladder. He had made himself tidy, and had all the appearance of having just got up. As in his broad-brimmed sombrero and loosely hanging poncho he slouched up to the worthy couple with a clever imitation of the Chilian peasant's walk, I should have had difficulty in recognizing him myself if I had chanced upon him unexpectedly.

"What is all the din at the castle about, father?" he asked the cottager, with an air of rustic unconcern.

The old man looked at him keenly.

"A prisoner has escaped. I suppose you know nothing of it?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I know no prisoner at the castle," Rodrigo answered, truthfully enough. "When did he escape?"

"During the night, or early this morning, I suppose," replied the cottager. "At any rate, they have only just sounded the alarm."

"Well, we shall soon know all about it," observed Rodrigo, "for scouts will be coming out in all directions searching for him."

A girl's voice could now be heard, calling, "Tomas, Tomas!" and presently at a little gateway by the side of the cottage appeared its owner, a pretty specimen of the fresh Chilian peasant girl.

"Tomas!" she again repeated, shading her eyes from the morning sun with her hand.

"Here I am, señorita!" answered Rodrigo, sheepishly. Young girls always inspired him with alarm.

"I want you to help me with the brown cow. Something has made her restless. She has kicked the pail over twice, each time I tried to milk her."

"I am coming, señorita," was Rodrigo's submissive reply.

But just then the sound of a galloping horseman reached her ears, and the young girl stopped and looked down a winding bridle-path in the direction of the castle. It was not long before a trooper came into sight.

"Anita," said the old man to his daughter, "I think it must be Conrado!"

The color rose to Anita's cheeks, and she joined the group in front of the cottage.

"Yes, father," she said, as the horseman drew near, "it is Conrado."

A bunch of leafy shoots effectually concealed me, though through them I could plainly see the group beneath the tree.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Where are you going to in such a hurry, Conrado?" asked the woodman, as the trooper pulled up his horse from full career on to its haunches. He was a good-looking young fellow, fair for a Chilian, of powerful frame and fearless bearing.

"A prisoner has escaped," he said. "Have you seen any one pass this way?"

"No," answered the old couple, simultaneously.

"Nor you, Anita?" he went on, smiling down at the fresh young girl before him.

"I have been no farther this morning, Conrado, than the yard at the back of the cottage."

Conrado bit his lip.

"I was hoping that you might be able to give me some information. Don Guido is in a great rage about the matter, and has offered a reward of five hundred pesetas to the trooper who brings him back."

Anita's bright eyes glistened.

"I hope you will earn it, Conrado!" she said, with a pretty smile.

"I hope so, too, sweetheart!" he answered.

It was evident that they were betrothed, and that the five hundred pesetas would be a very welcome wedding present.

"Who is the prisoner," asked Anita's mother, "that Don Guido should be so angry at his escape?"

"It is the English captain who attacked the castle and was taken prisoner. He is a brave fellow, and was sentenced to be shot this morning."

"Oh!" exclaimed Anita, with a woman's ready sympathy; "were they going to shoot him? Then I hope he will escape."

"I should not be sorry myself, except for the five hundred pesetas. But you must know that he has nearly killed his jailer, Miguel. The sergeant was found lying

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

senseless on the ground with a large wound at the back of his head."

"It is a pity that he did not quite kill him," replied Anita. Miguel was evidently no favorite of hers.

"Don't let your tongue run on so fast, Anita," said her mother. "Miguel is Don Guido's right-hand man, and it is not well to speak like that against him."

Anita pouted, but was silent, and Conrado gathered the reins in his hands.

"Well, I must be off again, as none of you can give me any information. Tomas here," he continued, jerking his thumb in Rodrigo's direction, "has not seen anything?"

The boatswain had assumed an expression of profound stupidity.

"He never sees anything," answered Anita for him. "Why, he does not even look at me!" and she gave a little toss of her head.

Conrado broke into a good-natured laugh.

"Then there is no hope for him, Anita," he responded. "Well, I am off again! Good-bye!"

With a touch of the spur his animal plunged forward, and horse and rider were soon lost to view.

Don Guido's soldiers swarmed around the woodman's cottage that day, and I could not once move from my hiding-place. It was not safe for Rodrigo to speak to, or even look at, me, for the soldiers or the occupants of the cottage might detect the direction of his glance. The hours passed wearily enough for me. My position was very cramped, there being only just room for my body in the hole which I had made. To eat, I had a couple of dry biscuits, which Rodrigo had thrust in my hand as I climbed up the tree. To drink, I had nothing at all, and the midway sun proved very strong.

Little wonder, then, that when darkness had set in and

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Rodrigo came out from the cottage after supper, I was delighted to see him turn his steps towards my tree. Jumping out of my hole, I let myself down and stood beside him. The boatswain looked anxiously around.

"It is hardly safe for you to come down so early, señor," he said; "there are still plenty of soldiers about, and the woodman might come out at any moment."

"He may come out now for what I care!" I answered, testily. "I have cramp in both my legs, and am nearly dead with thirst."

"I will get you some water," said Rodrigo. He soon returned with a jug, which I emptied without once taking breath.

"That's better," I said, when I had finished; "now if you have anything for me to eat—"

Rodrigo brought out from his pocket some bread and cheese wrapped in a napkin.

"It was all I could get you, señor," he said. "While you were still in the castle, Anita used to put some cold meat and wine in a basket for me, as I did not return to the cottage in the middle of the day. But now that I am here to meals, there is nothing packed for me. If señor would only let me take the old man and his wife into our confidence—"

"No, no," I interrupted; "we cannot ask them to help in concealing a man for whose capture they, or their friends, could get five hundred pesetas. Besides, they would be ruined if Don Guido found they had been harboring me. Bread and cheese are quite good enough for me as long as I am here, which I hope will not be many days."

Rodrigo was silent, not appearing very sanguine on this point. Meanwhile, I made good progress with the bread and cheese, and, after taking some more water, I felt almost myself again. The boatswain supplied me

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

with biscuits, which he had brought from our store in the hollow tree, and a can of water to take up to my retreat with me. I also procured from him a jack-knife and a small line, the former to use in making my quarters more comfortable, and the latter to haul up any articles for which I might have need. Then, having stretched my legs by pacing to and fro for a while, I bade Rodrigo, much to his relief, good-night, and reascended to my hiding-place.

I was busy till midnight upon my cell, by which time I had enlarged it sufficiently to sit down on a ledge which I had left, with my back supported by the inside of the trunk. The numerous chippings which were the result of this labor I slipped into a hole which ran down inside the tree. I then took my seat, and, after the fatigues of the preceding night and day, fell at once into a sound sleep.

The birds were twittering in the foliage above me and the sun was shining through the swaying branches when I awoke the following morning. However hard one's bed may be, there is something peculiarly invigorating in a night spent in the open air. Perhaps it is the return to the simple habits of primeval times which proves so true a tonic to the system. Perhaps it is the merely physical discomfort which tends to brace the jaded nerves. Whatever might be the cause, I was conscious of feeling uncommonly strong and well that morning, as I rose to my feet to indulge in a luxurious yawn and stretch. Both operations were cut short by the sound of voices beneath me. I peered cautiously through the twigs and saw Conrado and Anita conversing together. The trooper was on foot, his horse standing a few paces from them. They were on the side of the tree away from the cottage, and it was evidently a lovers' meeting. Being no affair of mine, I was about to resume my seat when I heard my name.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"The English prisoner, Señor Wildash, has not yet been found, then?" said Anita, looking up into the trooper's handsome face.

"No, Anita, no trace of him has been discovered. We have scoured the country for many miles round, and nothing has been seen or heard of him; that is to say, if the country folk have told the truth, and I think they have, for they are beginning to know Don Guido now."

Anita shuddered, and said, with a little frown:

"I think your captain is a very cruel man!"

"He treats his troopers well, at any rate," returned Conrado, feeling that he ought to say something in his favor, "though it is true he makes up for it by treating other people very badly. There is Señorita Montenar, for instance—"

"What of her?" asked Anita, with sudden interest.

"She seems to be in his bad books. I was on guard in the dining-hall last night. He sat and scowled without saying a word to her throughout the meal, and her face was the color of the cloth."

"Poor young lady!" exclaimed Anita, in sympathetic tones. "Why does he behave like that to her?"

"Well, you know, he has got it into his head that she helped the Englishman to escape, though he cannot trace anything to her. There was a sentry placed that night at the entrance to the castle, and he swears that no one passed him. Miguel, too, declares that he saw no one, and believes that the devil himself had a hand in it."

Anita gave a merry laugh.

"It was the devil, then, who dealt him that blow on the back of his head. Miguel must have been indulging in a kindly thought for once, to have received so sharp a rebuke from his master."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I should not have been sorry if the blow had been a harder one," returned Conrado, "for Miguel is a cross-grained fellow. Well, little one," he continued, taking her hands in his, "I must say good-bye. I have many a mile to cover before the sun goes down."

The conclusion of the interview was certainly not intended for my eyes, and I resumed my seat. In truth, I felt no interest in the concerns of others, after the news Conrado brought. It seemed, then, that matters had turned out as I had feared. The señorita was being made to suffer for having espoused my cause on the evening when I was summoned to the dining-hall. It would have been hard enough if she had incurred Don Guido's resentment for having helped a friend. But when it was an enemy whom her kindness of heart had prompted her to succor, it seemed indeed unjust for her to receive such treatment for it.

And the most bitter reflection that occurred to me was that I was powerless to help her. With all the soldiers from the castle scouring the country for miles round in search of me, I was as completely imprisoned in my hiding-place as I had been within the castle walls. I could only hope that her confidence in the strength of her position might be fully justified, and that Don Guido would never dare to go to extremes against her.

This day passed much the same as the preceding one. Soldiers were continually in sight, either coming from or going to the castle, and no news reached the cottage. Conrado returned about sunset, dusty and tired, his horse in a lather of perspiration. He had travelled a great distance, he told the woodman, but heard nothing of the fugitive. Anita being busy milking the cows, he could not see her, and rode on gloomily towards the castle.

I was remarkably hungry again that evening, and be-
m

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

gan to doubt whether I could subsist on bread and cheese and water, with biscuits added to produce variety. It would have been well enough in the dark cell which I had lately quitted, and where despondency made the blood run slow. But here in the fresh air beneath the open sky, the pulse beat quicker, and more food was necessary to replace the corresponding waste. It was with little enthusiasm that I awaited the scanty evening meals which I was reckoning that Rodrigo would provide for me.

But when, after supper, the boatswain came out of the front door of the cottage, I was surprised to see Anita, carrying something in her hands, join him from the rear, and walk with him towards my tree. Rodrigo gave his whistle, and, my hiding-place being thus revealed, I had no alternative but to descend. He had evidently disobeyed orders and taken Anita into his confidence.

"You need not fear that I shall betray you," the young girl said as I reached the ground. "Tomas has told me everything, and I am very glad, for I think you would have starved if he had not done so. I have brought you something to eat," and she put into my hands a plate, which, in the faint light thrown by the cottage windows, I saw contained both meat and vegetables.

"It is very kind of you, Anita," I said, "but what will your father and mother say?"

"They will say nothing, for I shall not let them know."

"And Conrado, and the five hundred pesetas?"

"Who told you about the five hundred pesetas, señor?" she asked, looking at me with questioning eyes.

"I overheard Conrado talking of it yesterday."

"So you can overhear everything that is said down here, can you?" Then, after a slight pause, and with a

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rising color, she continued : " Did you overhear any one talking beneath you early this morning ? "

" I was very tired last night, Anita, and I slept till late," I answered.

The young girl seemed relieved, though she no doubt resolved to hold no more interviews with her lover beneath my tree.

The next day passed without incident, but on the afternoon of the fourth day after my escape from the castle I was not a little astonished to see Don Guido himself ride up to the cottage. He found the old woodman tending a few plants in the front of it.

" Have you seen anything of the prisoner who escaped from the castle a few days ago ? " he asked the old man, roughly.

" No, señor, I have seen no one," was the answer.

Don Guido frowned. From my coign of vantage I could see him well, and he was evidently in an evil humor.

" Of course you say no—I expected nothing else ; but has your house been thoroughly searched ? "

" No, señor ! " answered the old man, warmly. " I think I know my duty to the castle better than to— "

" That will do ! " interrupted Don Guido, jumping from the saddle. " Hold my horse while I inspect the cottage."

The old man took the reins with trembling hand, while Don Guido walked into the building. Some ten minutes elapsed, and then, to my surprise, he reappeared at the side gate with Anita and Rodrigo.

" Is this your daughter ? " he demanded of the woodman.

" Yes, señor."

" And who is this ? " he added, pointing to Rodrigo.

" That is Tomas, who works for me."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I have not seen him here before," rejoined Don Guido.

"His excellency does not often come to my humble cottage, and when he has done so Tomas has been at work away from home."

Don Guido looked keenly at Rodrigo, and then said, "How long have you been here?"

Rodrigo's sombrero was low down over his eyes, and, with his untrimmed beard, his peasant's dress and slouching attitude, he bore little resemblance to the man whom Don Guido had met at the time of my duel with Don Luis.

"It must be three moons ago by now, is it not, señorita?" he drawled, with peasant intonation, appealing to Anita to confirm his calculation.

"Yes," replied Anita, ready to support his fiction, "it must be three months ago."

"And where do you come from?"

"From the sierras yonder," answered Rodrigo, with a vague flourish of his hand in the direction of the Andes.

Don Guido turned to the woodman with an impatient gesture.

"I do not like the look of this man Tomas. He is either a cunning knave or an arrant fool, and will probably do as much harm in one case as in the other. His account of himself is very unsatisfactory, and it would be only acting in self-preservation if I shot him as a spy."

As he spoke his hand wandered to his pistol-case. I had already covered him with my weapon, and I waited, with a fierce anticipation of revenge, if I saw any signs of his intention to put the threat into effect. Anita robbed me of that satisfaction.

"If you saw as much of him as I do, señor," she said, "you would soon find that he is only a harmless fool. There is hardly a thing he can be trusted to do, unless somebody stands by him and shows him how to do it."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Rodrigo's vacant expression was so much in keeping with this account of him that Don Guido, with a contemptuous glance, turned on his heel and took his horse's reins.

"Well, he may be a fool," he said; "but fools are often wise men's tools. It would be well to put a soldier on guard here for the next few days."

He swung into the saddle, and tarried for a moment while he adjusted his feet in the stirrups. My pistol was still levelled at his head, and the temptation to kill a man who would undoubtedly kill me if I fell into his hands was strong upon me. The temptation, however, only lasted for a moment. Such an act would be nothing more than cowardly assassination. I lowered my pistol, and Don Guido rode off unharmed, once more free to do his worst against me.

CHAPTER XVI

THE intimation that a soldier would be sent to be on guard at the cottage was decidedly unwelcome. If he did his duty, there was little chance of my obtaining food or drink in my present quarters, and it would probably end in my being starved into surrender or driven to make a bold but hopeless effort to obtain my freedom.

My uneasiness was not diminished when, about an hour after Don Guido's visit, Miguel made his appearance. He was on foot, and a white bandage round his head made his cadaverous face and cross-set eyes seem more sinister than ever. Anita was feeding some chickens in front of the cottage, and it was as well that she did not see the expression on the sergeant's face as he walked up to her.

"So his excellency suspects that you know something here of the prisoner's escape?" he said, as soon as Anita became aware of his presence.

"Does he, indeed?" returned the young girl, with a toss of her head, and continuing her occupation without deigning to look up at him. "Did he tell you so?"

The sergeant was hardly prepared for so quick a parry.

"He did not tell me so, but any one can see that he does suspect the cottage, or he would not have ordered a soldier to be put on duty here."

"If he is the only soldier who is looking for the prisoner, it would seem that you are right."

Miguel stood silent for a while, watching her with a mixture of fierce resentment and unwilling admiration.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"It is a pity, Anita, that your tongue is so sharp, for you are certainly a very pretty girl."

"I have something better to do than to listen to such nonsense, so if that is all you have to say I will leave you for my work."

A faint flush of anger appeared on Miguel's sallow face. "Pray go, if you wish to, and I will talk to your father about the soldier that is coming. I had thought you would do as well, but it seems that I was wrong."

"What did you want to say about it?" asked Anita, arrested, woman-like, by her curiosity.

"I only wished to give you a chance of mentioning if there is any one whom you would like to have here."

Anita hesitated for a moment, and then said: "I do not care who it is, as long as it is not Conrado."

I was astonished at her words. Miguel could not have known of her betrothal, or she would not have played so bold a game.

"As you have given me so kind a welcome," answered the sergeant, smiling grimly, "your desire shall be gratified, and Conrado will not come. I must now be going. I have quite enjoyed my talk with you under the shade of this large tree. It is, indeed, a fine one," he continued, examining it more closely. "Ever since that dog of an Englishman escaped, I can seldom resist the temptation of putting a bullet into every big tree I see. If it is hollow, and there is any one inside, you find it out at once."

As Miguel spoke he drew out his pistol and pointed it at the tree. In return I covered him with mine and waited. Anita turned very pale, but with admirable self-control remarked:

"It seems to me a very silly waste of powder. For the same reason you might fire into every bush and thicket that you pass."

Miguel made no answer, but quickly took aim at a por-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

tion of the trunk on a level with my body. Self-preservation clamored for me to fire, but reason urged me to abstain. If I killed him, inquiries would be made for him at the cottage, to which he must have been known to set out from the castle, and I should get the woodman and his family into trouble. If he escaped, my secret would be out, and I should be quickly hunted down. I decided to run the risk of being hit, and faced the sergeant's pistol. A puff of smoke, a sharp report, and a dull thud occurred almost simultaneously. The bullet was buried in a little knot of wood in front of me.

Miguel lowered his pistol, and, turning to Anita, said : "That tree is solid enough, isn't it ? Why, what is the matter, girl ? You look as pale as a ghost !"

"Nothing," replied Anita, with a courageous attempt at a smile ; "only—I cannot bear the sound of firearms."

The girl lingered in the front of the cottage till Miguel was out of sight, and then ran up to the tree and called me anxiously.

"It is all right, Anita," I answered, "I am unhurt. You are a brave girl, and I owe my life to you."

She smiled gratefully for my ready answer, and seemed about to speak, but the tears were glistening in her eyes, and, unable to command her tongue, she turned and disappeared within the cottage. Conrado would have a plucky helpmate, I reflected, to go through life with him.

Miguel fell into the trap which Anita laid for him, and in his amiable desire to make things pleasant, was careful to send Conrado to take duty at the woodman's cottage. The lovers were delighted at their good-fortune, and I had good reason to be pleased. For although Anita did not let the trooper into the secret of my hiding-place, she always contrived to have him out of the way when I descended to take my evening meal and to ease my cramped limbs by pacing to and fro.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

A week had passed since my escape from the castle, and I was beginning to feel that I was destined to spend the rest of my days in the hollow of a tree, when a trooper galloped up to the cottage and exchanged a few words with Conrado, who was patrolling leisurely in front of it. As soon as his comrade had gone, Conrado called Anita, and they walked away to a spot where I could neither see nor hear them. But my curiosity was aroused when, on their return, I saw that Anita had been crying, and that her lover, after shaking hands with the woodman and his wife, who stood at the door of the cottage, marched off in the direction of the castle.

No soldier arrived to take Conrado's place, and I began to wonder if the watch had been countermanded altogether. Perhaps Don Guido had at last despaired of finding me, and decided to give up the search. If so, the time to arrange for my escape had now arrived. But neither Anita nor Rodrigo visited me to inform me of the news, and I could do nothing but indulge in idle speculations about its character.

I suppose I must have fallen asleep over this occupation, for when I awoke the sun was setting, and I became dimly conscious of voices beneath me.

"Has not your father any horses, then?" one of the party said.

In a moment I was fully awake, for I had recognized the voice. It was Señorita Montenar who spoke. I raised myself sufficiently to see the group beneath me, which consisted of Isabel, her mistress, and Anita.

"No, señorita, father keeps no horses," Anita answered.

"Can he get them from any one who lives near here?" Anita shook her head. "I do not expect that he could find any horses nearer than Osorno, and Osorno is ten miles distant."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"But I wanted the horses for to-morrow night. Do you think your father could procure them for me by that time?"

"Father is getting old," replied Anita, "and it is many years since he walked as far as Osorno."

"What, then, can we do, Isabel?" exclaimed the señorita, turning to her maid in evident distress.

"Perhaps there is some one whom he could send," suggested Isabel.

"There is Tomas," responded Anita, reflectively; "he might be willing to go."

"Who is Tomas?" inquired the señorita.

Anita displayed a momentary hesitation before she answered:

"Tomas is a countryman who helps my father. I will go and bring him to you."

I was becoming very interested in the conversation. How many horses did the señorita want, who were going to ride them, and where were they going to, were questions I asked myself in quick succession. I looked at the señorita, and allowed my eyes to rest upon her, without fear of causing that embarrassment which would have arisen if my presence had been known. She was gazing in front of her through the wood, though no particular object appeared to be attracting her attention. In the delicate, almost fragile form before me, with its pale face and wistful attitude, I hardly recognized the proud and resolute girl which the señorita had always appeared to me. Surely tears were glistening in her eyes, and there was a tremble in her voice as she turned to her maid and said:

"What if we can get no horses, Isabel?"

"But we shall get them, señorita," replied the other, confidently.

"It is possible that they cannot be bought just now."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Then we must wait a little while, until they can be bought," answered the maid.

"No, Isabel!" rejoined the señorita, with a return of her old decision. "I will not stay in the castle a day after Don Luis has left it. He is my cousin and would protect me, but I could not trust myself in Don Guido's hands alone."

"Don Guido talks of accompanying the expedition himself, señorita," objected Isabel.

"I have long ceased to believe what Don Guido says. He promised me that he would revoke the sentence of death which he passed on Sefior Wildash, yet his execution was ordered, and would have been carried out if he had not escaped."

"It is that which has made Don Guido so bitter against you," Isabel observed.

The señorita was silent for a moment, gazing thoughtfully before her. Then she said in a low tone, as if to herself :

"Yes, it was that, but I do not regret it."

No, it was I who regretted it, who cursed myself for having been the cause of the indignities to which Don Guido had subjected her. This girl, whose kind heart had prompted her to save the life of one who had no claim upon her, had now to pay the penalty for her humanity. I had indeed incurred a debt at her hands, which I must risk everything to repay. It devolved on me to provide her with the means of escape, as she had done to me.

Anita now returned with Rodrigo at her side. The señorita gazed at him curiously, and I fancied I saw a look of surprise as her eyes met his, beneath the shade of his wide sombrero. But her composure returned when Rodrigo said, in his drawling country accent :

"What is it that the señorita wishes?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I want a couple of good horses for my maid and myself."

Rodrigo looked from one to the other with rustic stolidity of countenance.

"Good horses are difficult to get," he answered, sagely.

His deliberation irritated me. Was he going to refuse to help them?

"If we cannot get good horses," rejoined the señorita, "we must put up with indifferent ones. But horses we must have."

Rodrigo pondered with his eyes upon the ground. At length he raised them.

"There is a fair at Osorno at the end of next month. Perhaps—"

"Next month!" echoed the señorita, with an impatient gesture; "I want them to-morrow night!"

Rodrigo was silent again, and scratched his head. I could have kicked him for playing the part of a country clown with such scrupulous exactitude. Even Anita's patience was tried, and she exclaimed:

"Come, Tomas, brighten up your wits, and show the señorita that you are not such a fool as you look! Don't you see that the matter is important?"

"Aye, aye, I'm thinking," replied Rodrigo, evidently not to be flustered by any one. "I am as good a judge of a horse as any man in Chile, and if there are any to be got, I'll get them. There will be none nearer than Osorno, and that is a long distance. I was to have felled a couple of trees to-morrow—"

"Father is in no hurry for them," interposed Anita.

"Very well, then," concluded Rodrigo, with the air of a man who had sufficiently displayed his independence of spirit, "I will go to Osorno to-morrow morning and try to get the horses."

At this point the señorita took Anita aside, and ex-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

changed a few words with her, the drift of which I did not catch. Then, turning to Rodrigo again, she said :

“Do you know this part of the country well, Tomas?”

“I ought to do so, señorita, for I was born here,” he answered, with unblushing mendacity.

“Then you would be able to act as our guide?”

This he seemed to regard as a very different matter, and replied :

“Where is it that you want to go?”

“To Valdivia, but without making use of the high-road which connects Osorno to it.”

“Then you will have to take to the country roads at the foot of the Andes.”

“Any road will do as long as it is unfrequented.”

“Those road are frequented chiefly by Indian bandits.”

The señorita hesitated for a moment and then continued :

“Still, you will consent to take us?”

Why was he so long in answering? I was nearly beside myself with anger, and shook my fist at him in impotent pantomime. At length he said :

“I will be your guide, señorita, if master allows me to go, but by that route one man would be of little use. You could not have less than two.”

I began to see his object now. He had not been such a fool after all. His last words made the señorita thoughtful.

“Do you mean that two would be necessary to protect us against the robbers?” she asked. “Well, then, we must have two. Where can we get another?”

I waited anxiously for Rodrigo’s answer.

“There is a small farmer near here,” he answered, “who is a friend of mind. He would perhaps agree to come with us. I will ask him about it to-morrow.”

“Then that is settled,” said the señorita, with an air

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of great relief. "If your friend comes we shall want four horses, and they must be ready at this spot by midnight to-morrow. Here is some money for the purchase of them," she concluded, holding out a dainty lady's purse.

For a moment Rodrigo hesitated, and for the second time the señorita regarded him with curious eyes. But it was only for a moment, and then he took the purse, saying in his peasant dialect that he would get the horses, if there were any to be got, and would make a good bargain with the señorita's money.

That evening when Anita and Rodrigo brought my supper I at length heard all the news. Anita said Conrado had told her that the search for me had been abandoned, as the men were wanted for an expedition against a castle to the south of Monzana, held by a man who, though professing to belong to the Spanish cause, would not acknowledge Don Guido's authority. The attacking force was to be divided into two parties, one under Don Luis Martinez, who would execute a flank movement, and for that purpose start early the following morning. The second party would leave at sunset, but it had not been yet announced who would take command of it.

I now saw that the señorita had good reason to regard with suspicion Don Guido's designs. The fact that Don Luis would be sent off early in the morning, while Don Guido might not go at all, made it appear that the latter had some project on hand for which he preferred to have the younger man out of the way. It was evidently necessary that the señorita should be able to get away on the following night, and I determined to make the arrangements for her departure as complete as possible. Accordingly, after I had eaten my supper, and Anita had withdrawn, I had a long talk with Rodrigo about our plans.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

When taken prisoner at the castle, there was a good sum of Chilian paper money on me, concealed in the lining of my uniform. I had not forgotten to take the money out when I abandoned the uniform, and I now gave some of it to Rodrigo, telling him to pay for our two horses out of it, and to get any other articles which he thought necessary. I also bade him bring at once to my present hiding-place what ammunition and biscuits still remained in the hollow tree where he had stored them.

Before he started off I asked him to procure from Anita an envelope and a sheet of paper. Then in my cell at the top of the trunk, in the feeble light from the cottage windows, I counted out fifty ten-peseta notes and folded them up in the sheet of note-paper, on which I wrote in pencil: "A wedding-gift to Anita and Conrado, from one for whom they sacrificed this sum."

Having put the packet in the envelope and addressed it to Anita and Conrado, I composed myself to spend what I hoped would be my last night in the forest.

CHAPTER XVII

IT is a merciful dispensation of Providence which hides the future from our view. Some of the keenest pleasures in life consist in flattering anticipations of coming events. So true is this that the realizations of our dreams seldom if ever equal what we have pictured them in our imaginations. Ignorance of the future, too, enables us to pass weeks and months in placid contentment, just before we are plunged into the most trying experiences of our lives.

If I had foreseen the perils and dangers to which we should be exposed on our journey to Valdivia, I certainly should not have been in such high spirits when I awoke on the following morning. The sun was shining through the leaves, the branches swayed with a gentle breeze, and nature seemed to rejoice on this the last day of my captivity in the forest. As there were still a large number of soldiers left at the castle, I did not think it wise to leave my retreat in the daytime, but occupied myself in making—out of a sack which Rodrigo procured—some bags to carry our biscuits and ammunition.

With the construction of these bags I contrived to pass the day, and when it was dark Anita came out for the last time with my supper. She was more silent than usual, as she stood by me, waiting to take the plate and cup away when I had finished. I went steadily on with my meal, for I was hungry, but when I had almost finished I said :

“Your thoughts are far away from here, Anita?”

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"What makes you think so, señor?"

"Because you have hardly spoken a word to me tonight. You are thinking of Conrado."

The young girl made a gesture as though in denial, but I went on :

"Tomas has told me that you are betrothed to him, so I know all. When will the marriage be?"

"How can any one tell, señor, with the war still going on?"

"Let us hope that it will soon be over, then. I have written my best wishes to you and to Conrado in this letter, but you must not open it till he is with you."

Anita took the letter and thanked me with a pretty smile, saying that she hoped that she would soon be able to open it, for then she would be happy again.

A little before midnight I lowered the four bags which I had made—two small ones filled with ammunition and two large ones with biscuits—and descended to the ground. The hour struck, and, after waiting some little time, I was beginning to fear that the señorita and Isabel had been unable to get out from the castle and that something had happened to Rodrigo, when they all three appeared, the women from one direction and the boatswain from the other.

"Which is Tomas?" asked the señorita, who, like her maid, was dressed in black, with a black mantilla over her head and shoulders.

"I am Tomas," said Rodrigo, stepping forward, "and this is my friend the farmer of whom I spoke."

"And where are the horses?" continued the señorita, looking anxiously round.

"They are on the other side of the river, señorita. The bridge has been removed, and we shall have to cross the ford about a mile and a half lower down."

The señorita was alarmed.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Perhaps it has been done on purpose to prevent my going. We must not lose a moment. Lead on, Tomas."

Shouldering the bags which I had made, Rodrigo and I set out, followed closely by the women. The boatswain was by this time well acquainted with the route, and led us straight on without a moment's hesitation.

After crossing the main avenue from the castle to the river, the path grew wilder, briers and underwood obstructing the passage. The women's dresses were frequently being caught, and soon Rodrigo took charge of Isabel, while I attended to the señorita, and by walking close in front kept the path open for them.

In this way we at length got clear of the wood, and took to the river-bank. The señorita had been very silent, and it was not till Rodrigo halted, and said that the ford had been reached, that at length she spoke.

"Is it very deep?" she asked, with evident concern.

"No, señorita," replied Rodrigo; "the river has gone down a great deal within the last week. We shall be able to carry you across without wetting the soles of your feet."

As he spoke, he began to lead Isabel across the rough bowlders in the dry part of the river to the water channel in the middle. At the same time the señorita held out her hand for me to take. It was ungloved, and on the third finger shone the diamond ring on which she set such store. As I grasped her hand, I fancied that a tremor ran through it, and for the first time she turned and tried to look into my face. But it was too dark to see my features beneath the shadow of my wide sombrero, and, firmly retaining her hand, I led her to the channel in the centre.

Here Rodrigo, who in an adventure of this character seemed to lose his usual fear of the other sex, seized Isabel boldly and strode into the stream.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Are you sure that it is safe?" the señorita said to me, her woman's fears breaking through the reserve she had hitherto maintained.

I did not answer, being afraid that my voice would betray me, but lifted her off the ground, and with her left arm round my neck, and her heart beating almost audibly against my shoulder, I followed in Rodrigo's footsteps. Once started on our journey, the señorita displayed the greatest courage. Not a single exclamation escaped her lips, nor did her hold upon me tighten convulsively, as I descended deeper and deeper into the rushing water. Even when, in mid-stream, a large stone, against which I struck my foot, caused me to stumble badly, she did not utter a sound, but, regaining the position from which my unexpected movement had thrown her, she sank quietly and confidently into my arms again.

I set her down on the boulders on the other side of the channel, and we walked over the dry portion of the river to the bank beyond. The señorita was the first to speak, and then she addressed Rodrigo.

"You have not told me yet, Tomas, what is the name of your friend."

"Señor Vasco," replied Rodrigo, with ever-ready invention.

The young girl turned to me.

"I should like to thank you, Señor Vasco, for carrying me so well across the stream. I hope you did not hurt yourself when you stumbled in the centre."

There was no help for it now, and, disguising my voice as well as I could, I answered :

"I am unhurt, thank you, señorita."

The señorita stopped, and glanced quickly up at me. I expected every moment to hear her address me by my own name, but, to my great relief, she moved on again,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

without saying a word. The disguising of my voice had evidently been successful.

On rounding a little hillock we came upon the horses, but they were five instead of four in number, and there was a man in charge of them.

"This," said Rodrigo to the señorita, "is Carlos, from whom I bought the horses. He is making a journey himself in our direction, and, as he knows the country well, and three heads are better than two, I thought you might like him to accompany us."

The señorita said that she had no objection to his doing so, and then we put the women on their horses. The animals were certainly very sorry beasts, and I meant to ask Rodrigo for an explanation of it later, when he said :

"I hope the señorita will be satisfied with the horses. They certainly look poor creatures, but I could not get any others in Osorno. Is it not so, Carlos?"

Carlos said that it was true, and that what with the patriots to the north of them, and the Spaniards to the south of them, there were not a dozen horses left in the town.

The señorita replied that if they were the only ones procurable, it could not be helped, and that we had better press on without delay. Accordingly, Rodrigo and I jumped into our saddles, to which we had secured the bags containing our ammunition and biscuits, and we all set out, Carlos leading the way, the two women following, and the boatswain and myself bringing up the rear.

After we had gone a little distance, I purposely hung back, so that I could have a word or two with Rodrigo.

"Why did you bring that fellow Carlos?" I asked, as soon as we were out of earshot. "We shall have difficulty enough in finding food for four riders and their horses, without the addition of a fifth."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I got Carlos, in the first instance, señor," answered Rodrigo, quietly, "because we could not do without a guide."

I had quite forgotten that neither of us knew the country. Rodrigo's foresight was once more justified.

"You are right, Rodrigo," I acknowledged. "It is true that we must have a guide."

"In the second place, señor, another armed man will be useful, for, according to what I heard in Osorno, the route we are taking swarms with robbers."

"Three of us, at any rate, will be a match for them."

"Unless we fall in with Benavides, señor, who is said to have a large number of followers."

I had, of course, heard of Benavides. He was a half-breed Spanish Indian, who had been sergeant in a Spanish regiment in Chile, and for some grave offence had been condemned to death. Contriving to escape, he joined the Indians in their desultory warfare with the Spaniards, and then offered his services to the Chilian patriots, just after they had gained possession of Concepción. His offer was accepted, and for some time he met with considerable success in his operations against the enemy. One of his projects, however, did not meet with the approval of Governor Freyre, who said that it was too large an undertaking to be intrusted to a man of Benavides' previous character. The ex-sergeant, in a fit of rage against the governor for this statement, threw up his post, and once more joined the Indians, preying now upon the Chilians instead of on the Spaniards. In this work he seemed to have been very successful of late.

"After all," I said, at length, in answer to Rodrigo's last remark, "Benavides' exploits have been chiefly against unarmed civilian travellers. He is only a half-breed himself, and it is not likely that he and his Indians

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

would make a determined stand against three fully armed men."

Rodrigo did not answer, and, having nothing further to discuss, we pushed on, and took up our position again behind the women.

We had covered some little distance in this fashion, when the girths of Isabel's saddle required tightening, and Rodrigo dismounted to attend to it. When we started again, I found myself bringing up the rear, with the señorita at my side. The road was little more than a stony track, winding its way towards the distant Andes, now descending sombre defiles overshadowed with thick-foliaged trees, now crossing open stretches of hilly land.

The señorita was silent for some little time, and then she said :

"So, Señor Vasco, you own a farm at a little distance from the castle?"

"Yes, señorita," I replied, readily, confident that my disguised voice sufficiently protected me.

"And what branch of farming do you follow?"

"All kinds," I answered, comprehensively; "corn-growing, cattle-grazing, and horse-breeding."

"Are you successful with your horses?"

"I have been very lucky, señorita."

"Then Tomas should have applied to his friend instead of going all the way to Osorno."

I was sorry I had allowed my imagination to suggest horse-breeding as one of my pursuits. I could only answer :

"I have lately been obliged to part with my stock, señorita."

"That was unfortunate for our journey to-night," she answered.

After this there was a slight pause. I determined to put a curb on my inventive faculty in future descriptions

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of my double, Señor Vasco. I was soon put to another trial. We were approaching a point where the road forked into two branches, one turning abruptly to the left and the other slightly to the right.

"Which of these two roads do we take, Señor Vasco?" asked the señorita.

I gazed anxiously at Carlos, and fancying he was turning his horse's head towards the left, I answered:

"We take the road to the left, señorita."

As I spoke Carlos bore to the right, and the señorita broke into a merry laugh.

"Señor Vasco's knowledge of the country is somewhat small, especially for one who has had so many horses at his disposal. If it were not for his dress, I should be inclined to take him for the English prisoner who lately escaped from the castle."

"Señorita," I replied, in no little confusion, "you are too clever for me, and I have fallen into all the traps you laid. Perhaps, if I had been more cautious—"

"You would not have deceived me, Señor Wildash. The hand you gave to help me across the boulders on the farther side of the river was not the hand of a Chilean peasant-farmer, and when I compelled you to speak after we had crossed the channel I knew your voice at once, in spite of your efforts to disguise it. But why were you anxious that I should not recognize you?"

"I was afraid you might hesitate to accept my escort."

"I ought not to accept it, señor. If Don Guido pursues me, and you are in my company, he will take you prisoner again and have you shot. You would escape much quicker by yourself, unencumbered by two women. Then leave me, señor, and ride on."

"You have risked much for me, señorita, and you must let me risk a little for you. Three of us, well

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

armed, will give a good account of ourselves, unless Don Guido brings a whole squadron to capture you."

The señorita saw that my mind was made up, and answered :

" Well, then, señor, if you will not be persuaded, let us at least push on as quickly as we can."

The horses, however, were sorry animals, and nothing more could be got out of them beyond a shuffling trot or an ambling canter. After three hours' riding we had covered very little ground, and I began to despair of their lasting out till we reached Valdivia. We were now climbing at a walk out of an unusually deep ravine through which the road had passed. Dawn seemed to have hastened its advent while we were in the gloomy depths below, for as we emerged on the hill-side faint streaks of light were visible above the lofty Andes, which confronted us. Suddenly I heard the sound of horses galloping behind us.

The señorita turned to me and said, in accents of alarm :

" They have already overtaken us, señor ! What can we do ?"

For answer, I called out to Rodrigo and Carlos, and bade the señorita ride on as fast as she could with Isabel. The two men joined me at once, for they too had heard the sound of horsemen galloping. We drew up in a line across the road and awaited our pursuers.

The sound of the horses' feet had now died away in the deep ravine, but we soon heard them again mounting the hill which we had lately climbed. A deep stillness lay on everything else around us. The faint light which precedes dawn displayed a cold, gray country, wrapped in a morning mist. Not a bird chirped amid the brushwood at the side of the road ; not a lizard clambered over the large, loose stones. Nothing could be heard

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

but the breathing of our horses, as they listened with pricked ears to the approaching steps.

Soon two horsemen appeared at the top of the hill, and, in spite of the uncertain light, I recognized in one of them Don Guido. They slackened their pace on seeing us opposed to them, and then Don Guido, who, from information which he was doubtless able to obtain, concluded that we belonged to the señorita's party, drew his sword and spurred against us. Rodrigo had wisely purchased two swords at Osorno when he bought the horses, and I now drew mine. The chance of once more aiming a blow at Don Guido in open combat inflamed me, and, in my eagerness to prevent my comrades robbing me of my revenge, I also spurred my horse and advanced to meet him.

But I had forgotten what kind of animal I had between my legs. In spite of all my efforts, I could not get more than a half-hearted trot out of him, and Don Guido's onset at full gallop with his magnificent charger swept me to the side of the road, while he was carried on against my two companions. I was able, however, to intercept his follower, and we were soon engaged in a brisk encounter.

My opponent was a powerful man, who wielded his sabre with great skill. Mounted on a horse, too, that responded to every movement of the reins, he had me at a considerable disadvantage. I should have been hard pressed had he not in his over-confidence given me an opening, of which I immediately availed myself, inflicting a sharp cut on his right arm and causing the sabre to fall from his grasp. Before I could follow up my advantage the man had wheeled round and galloped back the way he came.

At the same time my attention was attracted by the shouts of my companions, and I turned round to see Don

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Guido in full retreat. He had evidently discovered that his follower had failed him, and had decided to retire before he had three men instead of only two to fight against. I determined to make a desperate effort to stop him, and waited for him at the side of the road with my horse's head turned towards the centre of it. He came charging down towards me, his horse with its ears laid back and a vicious gleam in its eye. When he was only half a dozen yards from me I clapped both spurs into my animal and made him jump into the middle of the road. A moment later there was a violent shock, and I felt myself hurled upon the ground.

What I intended had occurred. My manœuvre had thrown Don Guido and his charger, as well as my horse and myself, into the road. Unfortunately their impetus carried them a little past me, and before I could reach them they had both scrambled to their feet and Don Guido was once more in the saddle.

As I turned to mount my horse, keenly disappointed at my failure, the señorita rode quickly up to me.

"Are you hurt, Señor Wildash?" she asked, anxiously.

"Nothing beyond a shaking, señorita," I replied.

"How could you face him twice on that wretched horse of yours? I thought that both of you were killed."

"He is as little hurt as I am, señorita," I answered, bitterly.

"You are mistaken, señor, for as he rode off he held his reins in his right hand, while his left arm hung useless at his side."

CHAPTER XVIII

ALTHOUGH Don Guido had sustained a broken arm, the matter was not serious enough to prevent him returning to the pursuit when he had procured sufficient troopers from the castle to insure our capture. No time, then, was to be lost, and we set out once more upon our journey as fast as our poor beasts could carry us.

The road lay for some distance now across an undulating, sparsely wooded table-land, cultivated in patches only here and there, with the cottages of its rustic population dotted at wide intervals upon its surface. At length it descended a long hill, and turned to enter a valley running towards the north. Carlos halted at the bend, and, pointing up the valley, said :

"That, señor, is the most direct road from here to Valdivia, and in winter is the only practicable one. For this reason it is sure to be the route taken by Don Guido if he comes in pursuit of you again. Our only other path lies there," he added, pointing to a rough, winding track ascending the opposite side of the valley in an easterly direction.

"But we cannot take our horses along that path," I objected. "It is almost too rough to walk along on foot."

Carlos shrugged his shoulders.

"The path is rough, it is true, señor, but it may be the quicker in the end."

The choice was not easy. If we took the direct road, we stood more risk of being overtaken by Don Guido.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

If, on the other hand, we selected the rugged path, we might find ourselves in a district where travelling would be slow and tedious, where provisions would be difficult, if not impossible, to get, and where we should be more than ever at the mercy of robber bands. Was it wise, too, to trust Carlos so implicitly? I knew nothing of him, and he might possibly be tempted by the large reward which Don Guido would give him to betray us into his hands, or he might lead us into some brigands' nest, where he would have a share of the plunder. However, we could not do without him, and, as we had to trust him to a certain extent, it would be as well to trust him altogether. I told him to lead on, for we would take the rugged path.

Our progress now was necessarily slow. The path would have been a difficult one for a sure-footed mule, but to our jaded horses proved almost insuperable. When we had climbed half-way up the hill my beast fell for the third time, and I determined to make the rest of the ascent on foot. The others were soon obliged to follow my example, and, leading our horses, we toiled slowly upward.

By the time we reached the top the women were so exhausted that I almost despaired of being able to continue the route which I had chosen. The path, however, now began to improve, and a wood which covered the ravine lying on the farther side of the hill looked so inviting that I still held on. It was not long before we were sheltered from the increasing heat of the sun by the welcome shade of trees. The track had also improved so much that we remounted our horses, and after half an hour's gradual descent we reached a stream which ran down the centre of the ravine.

We had been riding for nearly eight hours without a rest, and, as this seemed a convenient spot for the pur-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

pose, I called a halt. The horses were set loose to graze along the banks—there was little fear of their running away—and we sat down to make a breakfast of the biscuits we had brought, accompanied by fresh water from the stream.

This frugal fare was very welcome to us all, and soon the color which had fled from the señorita's cheek during the tedious ascent of the hill returned to it. The novelty, too, of a meal in the open air, after the gloomy seclusion of Monzana Castle, had an exhilarating effect upon her spirits, and she conversed with more animation than I had ever seen her display. For the second time that morning she broke out into a merry laugh, soft, low, and musical, which revealed a very different person to the Caritá Montenar with whom I was acquainted. Hitherto I had enjoyed no opportunity of seeing the gayer side of her nature, for we had met in circumstances with which humor would have ill assorted.

After an hour's rest we once more set out upon our way. The path continued good, and, although the hills were numerous and steep, we were sheltered from the sun for the greater part of the distance by the woods through which we passed. At two o'clock we had another halt, though of shorter duration, Carlos telling me that it would be well to reach the cottage of a small farmer with whom he was acquainted at an early hour, as he might be able to provide a bed for the señorita and her maid.

Towards sunset we approached a little homestead, nestling in the fringe of a wood, with a good extent of tilled land in front of it. A man, apparently the owner, was standing at the entrance watching us draw near, and turning every now and then to silence a chained dog which was barking furiously at us. Carlos rode on in front, and, dismounting, led the man aside to speak to

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

him. I should have been better pleased if he had not observed such secrecy, but had allowed me to hear the nature of the proposals which he was apparently making on our behalf. But as Carlos had spoken of him as a friend, who would perhaps do for him what he would not do for strangers, I could not well intrude upon the conversation.

At length the man turned, and, after a brief glance at us, approached and said to me:

" You and your party are welcome, señor, to such poor hospitality as I am able to afford you. If the señoritas will follow me, I will take them to my wife, who will do all she can to make them comfortable for the night."

While Carita Montenar and her maid entered the house, we led the horses round to the yard, where the farmer soon joined us and apportioned them their stalls. He then led the way up a ladder to the loft, and said :

" This, señores, is all the accommodation I can offer you. We have only one spare room in the house, and that has been put at the disposal of the señoritas."

I thanked him, and said we could not wish for more comfortable quarters. After having attended to our horses, and made our arrangements for the night, we were summoned to the house for something to eat and drink.

" I cannot call it dinner," said our host, " for there is no meat ; but we have prepared as good a meal as we can make out of such food as we possess."

He led us to a room where we found the señorita and Isabel, and where the table was laid for five, the host explaining that he and his family had already taken their evening meal. His wife waited on us, and, although there was no meat, we made an excellent dinner off soup, roast chicken, and boiled rice, with good native wine to drink with it.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The following morning I was astir betimes, and had the horses saddled by dawn, desirous of not wasting an hour longer than necessary while we were still separated by so short a distance from the castle of Monzana. The host had not said a word about Don Guido, and I had no desire to introduce his name myself. Probably Carlos had explained everything, and the farmer had been willing to run the risk of entertaining us in consideration of the sum which he expected to receive for it. In this assumption, however, I soon found that I had done him an injustice. On offering him a sum of money, he refused it, saying, with a touch of pride which made me regret my indiscretion :

"Though we may be poor, we Chilian farmers do not accept payment in return for hospitality."

This confirmed me in the favorable impression I had already formed of the man, and I reproached myself for having entertained any suspicion of Carlos, who possessed such honest friends.

After a cup of coffee we took leave of our kind hosts and started on our journey once more. Our path lay for some distance along the edge of the wood forming the boundary of the farm which we had left. It was a lovely morning. The sun, as it rose behind the forest, gilded with its rays the topmost branches of the trees, without penetrating to our path. The doves cooed softly to each other in the recesses of the wood, and bright-colored lizards, startled by the horses' feet, darted nimbly across the track. Isabel was rallying the bashful Rodrigo in a merry vein as they rode on in front of us, and the señorita, to whose cheeks the night's rest had given a beautiful color, seemed as willing for conversation as her maid.

"How kindly they treated us at the farm," she said.
"The wife attended to all our wants. I wished her

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to accept a little present from me, but she would take nothing."

I told her that the husband had also refused to take anything for his hospitality, and she expressed surprise.

"It looks," she said, "as if Don Guido's influence did not extend a very great distance, when we are treated so well, without its being known whether we are his enemies or his friends."

"We may have been so fortunate, señorita," I replied, "as to fall in with a man who is brave enough to disregard Don Guido's wishes. It will not do to congratulate ourselves for some time yet on being clear of those who would like to curry favor with him."

The topic made her thoughtful for a while, but, fanned by the fresh morning breeze, she soon regained her spirits, and conversed with animation on every subject that suggested itself. I, too, became intoxicated with the pure air, and gave myself up unreservedly to the pleasure of her company, not thinking of the future and forgetful of the past.

We took our lunch, with which our late host insisted on providing us, by the side of a stream as on the previous day, and after a short rest, for I was still anxious to waste no more time than absolutely necessary, we resumed our journey. It was on this afternoon that an accident occurred which might have ended in a catastrophe but for the señorita's self-command and courage. The road had once more become very rough, leading at length to a narrow gorge, where the track was cut out on the side of a rock some three hundred feet high. Taking Carlos's advice, we all dismounted and led our horses, as they could not be trusted in such a pass. I brought up the rear, with the señorita's horse just in front of me.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

We toiled slowly up the face of the cliff, loose stones making the walking very tedious, and the afternoon sun, to which we were fully exposed, burning us with its powerful rays. The farther we went the more terrible seemed the sheer descent into the gorge beneath. The track was barely six feet wide, the centre of it being thus less than three feet from the edge.

We had passed, however, what Carlos called the most dangerous part, and I was thinking that all would now be well, when the señorita's horse stumbled and fell on to its knees. The señorita was fortunately leading it by a loose rein, so that the sudden jerk had not caused her to lose her footing. But the sight of an animal struggling to gain its feet on the edge of a precipice would have unnerved most women, and I watched the señorita anxiously, afraid to utter a word lest I should make matters worse.

The señorita, however, without losing her presence of mind, stood her ground firmly, still holding the reins, and trying to assist the horse in its struggles to stand up again. Twice the animal contrived to get one of its forefeet on the ground, and twice it slipped back on to both knees again. In her anxiety to help her horse, the señorita would not let go the reins, and at any moment the animal might roll over the cliff and carry her along with it. There was a brief interval before the poor beast made its third attempt, and then, seeing that it was swaying over towards the edge, I dashed past on the inside of it, and caught the señorita's arm. I was only just in time to steady her, for the sudden wrench with which the reins were torn from her hand, as the animal rolled over the edge and disappeared, would otherwise have made her lose her balance. The señorita stood perfectly still as I held her, unable to realize at first what had occurred. But when the thud of the animal's

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

body against the earth beneath was heard, she gave a shudder.

"It was terrible," she said, "to be unable to prevent it."

"Any attempt to do so," I answered, as I released my hold upon her, "would have resulted in your being dragged over the cliff as well. It is fortunate that nothing worse occurred. Can you continue along the pass unassisted, or has this accident spoiled your nerve?"

But the señorita replied that she required no help, and, in spite of the shock which she had just experienced, she walked on alone with unfaltering step. When at length we reached the end of the pass, I consulted with Carlos as to what had better be done. He said that although we might be able to obtain another horse, it was extremely improbable that a lady's saddle could be procured, and he accordingly volunteered to make his way down to the bottom of the cliff and recover the one on the dead animal's back. Although it would incur a delay of at least an hour, there was no alternative, and Carlos set off on his quest, while the rest of us sat down to await his return.

No one seemed disposed for conversation during this dreary interval. I saw that, in addition to the hour thus wasted, we should lose still further time from the fact that one of our party would have to travel on foot till another horse could be obtained. The chances of Don Guido overtaking us were now greatly increased, and, considering how difficult it was to avoid observation, there must have been plenty of people who had seen us, and who would be willing to put the Spaniard on our track. Fortune certainly seemed to be on the turn against us.

An hour and a half passed before Carlos, heated and

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

perspiring, returned from his quest with the saddle and bridle thrown over his shoulder. The undertaking had proved a good deal more difficult than he had anticipated, and it was hard work to do it in the time he occupied. Unfortunately, he went on to say, this delay would make it impossible for us to reach that evening the house at which he would have been able to get good accommodation for us, and that we must put up at the first place that offered, unless we wished to spend the night in the open air.

We put the señorita's saddle upon my horse, and as neither of the animals ridden by Carlos and Rodrigo were strong enough to carry two, we took it in turn to walk.

Thus, although the road improved considerably, we could not take advantage of it to push along at a greater speed, without leaving behind the one who was not mounted. In the couple of hours that remained before sunset, we were barely able to cover eight miles, and it was useless to think of attempting to reach the house at which Carlos had originally intended to put up. Accordingly, as darkness fell, we decided to ask for accommodation at a cottage that lay on the brow of the hill we were ascending.

The appearance of the place as we drew near to it certainly did not prepossess me in its favor. It looked very different to the one which sheltered us the previous night. The outside of the building was dingy and ill-kept, and, instead of a trim farm-yard, there were only a few rickety sheds, outside which a sow and her litter were searching in vain for something to eat.

Nor were the inmates any more attractive than their residence. As we approached, a tall, slouching half-breed, with wide sombrero and spurs to his boots, rolled out of the door and scowled in our direction, being

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

presently joined by a slatternly woman, who followed his example. No signs of cultivation could be seen around the house, except a small patch of beans on one side of it, and how the occupant gained his living it was difficult to see.

"Can you give us shelter here for the night?" I asked, as soon as we came up to them.

"We give nothing here," the man answered, in surly tones, without moving his hands from his pockets.

"Of course I meant that you would be paid for it," I said, testily, annoyed by the fellow's boorish manner.

The prospect of money was evidently an inducement. He looked at us in turn, and then, after a deliberate pause, went on :

"What is it that you want?"

"Accommodation for the señoritas in the house, and shelter for the men and horses."

The half-breed spoke in a low tone to his wife. They seemed to have some difficulty in coming to an understanding, but at length he turned to us and said :

"The señoritas can have the kitchen to themselves, and we can put the rest of you into the out-buildings."

At this juncture the señorita touched my arm, and, in a tone low enough not to be overheard, said :

"Let us ride on; I do not like the look of this man, and I am sure that he is not to be trusted."

Women often hit the mark intuitively, while men, with all their logic and so-called common-sense, go wide of it. I was half inclined to yield to her request, when some heavy drops of rain began to fall, the precursors of a storm which had been brewing for some time.

"We cannot ride on now, señorita," I replied; "you

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

would be soon wet through. Show us the accommodation, man," I added, turning to the half-breed.

But if I had known how our acquaintance with him was destined to end, exposure to the heaviest thunder-storm would have been preferable to shelter beneath his roof.

CHAPTER XIX

IT is seldom safe to judge by appearances, and we soon found that the half-breed, whose affairs seemed to be far from flourishing, had a very useful pony in the shed which he was pleased to call his stable, and plenty of corn and hay to feed it on. The only vacant stall was reserved for us, as there was no loft. It was covered with straw that was fresh and clean, and a man can have a much worse bed than good straw to lie upon. Our horses were taken to what had evidently been a cow-shed, though there were no cows in it now. In the place of them, curled upon some hay, was a dark, round ball, which the half-breed kicked as soon as he saw it.

"Get up, Tito, you lazy rascal," he cried, "and take these horses. So this is where you were trying to hide yourself. You are never to be found when you are wanted."

The bundle had uncurled itself, and proved to be a dark-eyed boy with ragged clothes and ill-kept hair, who regarded the half-breed with a look of keen resentment.

"Come," said the man, "don't stand there doing nothing, but tie these horses up quickly, or I will break that empty head of yours."

The boy glared at him, but turned to do what he was told, and, when we had seen our animals attended to, we joined the women in the house.

Here another surprise awaited us. Instead of a simple repast of vegetables—boiled beans and potatoes, perhaps—as I had expected, there were mutton cutlets frying on

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

the fire. I was still more astonished when the half-breed placed upon the table—on which, by the way, there was no cloth and only a meagre assortment of odd knives and forks—two bottles of the very best Chilian wine. How could such a man afford to eat meat and to drink the choicest Urmeneta in the market? In despair of solving the question, I applied myself to the fare before me, which, though not well dished up, was good, and very acceptable after our long day's ride.

At the conclusion of the meal I beckoned to the half-breed, and led the way to the stable, which was to be our quarters for the night. The thunder-storm, which had burst as soon as we were under cover, and which had been at its height during dinner, had now passed over, but was succeeded by a steady, persistent rain. On gaining the stable I took him up to his pony, and said:

"We had the misfortune to lose one of our horses today. How much do you want for this pony?"

The man looked at me keenly.

"You want to buy that pony? Caramba! but I would not part with him for any money."

The animal turned his head round, with a gleam in his eye and his ears laid back, as if he did not approve of being bartered for in this way. He was in excellent condition, and seemed a high-mettled beast. I was more than ever anxious to secure him.

"We are only going to Valdivia," I said. "If you prize him so highly we could no doubt arrange some means by which he would return to your possession."

"You are going to Valdivia, are you?" he repeated, slowly, seeming to ponder on the information. "Well, if you are going to Valdivia, I think I could arrange for the animal being returned to my possession."

It may have been only fancy, but, in the uncertain light of a dim lantern hanging from the wall, I thought I saw

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

a mocking smile upon his lips. I could, however, perceive no reason for it, and, concluding that I was mistaken, began to bargain for the animal. He asked from the first a very high price for it, and I could not get him to accept a smaller sum than two hundred and fifty pesetas. This reduced the cash I had in hand to one hundred pesetas, but, as I hoped to reach Valdivia on the following day, the amount would prove, I hoped, sufficient.

We turned in early that night, and, lulled by the pleasant crunching sound which the pony made as he ate his hay, and by the pattering rain outside, I soon fell fast asleep. During the night, however, I awoke with the consciousness of having heard something to arouse me, though I could not decide what it was. The lamp had gone out—at least, it was quite dark in the stable—and the pony having finished his feed, no sound but human snoring met my ears. But soon I fancied that I heard voices outside the stable door. What could be going on at this time of the night? I moved quietly towards the door, and through it I recognized the half-breed's voice.

"So they come from the castle of Monzana, do they?" he said.

"Yes," replied another voice, which was not near enough for me to detect its tone.

"And now they want to go to Valdivia. Well, we can arrange that nicely for them, can't we?" Here he gave a low laugh. "They are taking my pony, and don't forget that it is to come back to me."

The half-breed had begun to move away, and I did not hear the other's answer. But the conversation made me uneasy. How did he hear that we came from Monzana Castle, and what did he mean by saying that he could arrange nicely for us to get to Valdivia? I was half inclined to open the door and demand an explanation, but, after all, the man had said nothing to which I could

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

take exception. Accordingly, I lay down in the stall again, intending to keep my eye upon the fellow in the morning.

When I awoke at daybreak, I was considerably surprised to find that Carlos was no longer in the stable. I awoke Rodrigo, who still lay snoring at my side, and asked him if he knew where he had gone.

"I am a sound sleeper, señor," replied Rodrigo, when he had sufficiently roused himself to understand my question, "and I have neither heard nor seen anything since I closed my eyes last night."

Remembering the voices which had roused me, I jumped to my feet and went to the door. As I laid my hand upon the latch, it was raised from the outside, the door was opened, and Carlos stood before me.

"Good-morning, señor," he said, with a pleasant smile.

I was in no humor for civilities.

"Where have you been?" I demanded, angrily.

There was no mistaking my tone, and, looking at me in some astonishment, he answered, quietly enough :

"I have been in the cow-shed with the horses, señor. During the night I fancied I heard footsteps outside, and, thinking that it would be as well that one of us should keep watch over them, I went and spent the rest of the night there. But why do you ask, señor?"

If he was guilty, he certainly retained a wonderful command of his expression. I was already half ashamed of my suspicions, but I went on doggedly :

"I, too, heard something in the night, but it was the sound of two men talking. One of them was the half-breed. Were you the other?"

He looked at me with every appearance of surprise.

"I have not seen him, señor, much less spoken to him, since he parted from us last night after dinner."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The answer was given so straightforwardly that I could not bring myself to the belief that it was false. Hitherto Carlos had undoubtedly acted honestly by us, and it required more evidence than I possessed to make me think him capable of doing otherwise. As for the half-breed, I should like to put one or two questions to him if he could be found. Accordingly, I left the stable and looked for him in the different out-houses round the cottage.

I could not find him, however, and was about to enter the cottage itself to see if he was there, when his wife met me at the door.

"Is your husband within?" I asked.

The woman shuffled uneasily beneath my glance.

"No, señor, he had to leave early this morning. He has gone to market. Is there anything you want, señor?"

"I wanted to speak to him, but if he has gone, it cannot be helped. I suppose you can tell us what we owe you for this night's lodging."

"He left a bill, señor; I will get it," and she disappeared into a room opposite the kitchen, returning with a dirty half-sheet of paper, on which was scribbled in an unlettered hand:

"Food and lodging for five persons and their horses—one hundred pesetas.

This little bill would just take my last peseta. Well, there was no good in disputing it, and as I expected that night to be in Valdivia, where I could obtain a draft on the bank, I paid the account without a word, feeling that comment would be wasted.

As soon as we had finished our coffee, I had the horses brought round. It was decided that Carlos should ride the pony, as both Rodrigo and myself were too heavy for it. Just as we were about to mount, I caught sight

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of the lad whom we had found coiled up in the hay in the cow-shed on the previous evening, and whom I had not seen since. He was beckoning to me from the shelter of one of the out-houses.

Thinking that he was appealing to me for a gratuity, which he was afraid to ask for in the presence of his mistress, I decided to give him the few cents which I still happened to have in my pocket. But on my approaching him, holding out the money in my hand, to my surprise he waved it impatiently aside, and said in an excited tone, with anxious glances in the direction of the cottage :

“ Be warned by me, señor ! After crossing the stream do not take the road to the right !”

I could not conceive what the boy meant, and why a certain road to the right was to be avoided.

“ What is your objection, my lad, to the road you speak of ?” I asked.

But he would not enter into any explanation, being apparently in momentary fear of discovery by his mistress.

“ I can say no more, señor, than to beware of the road to the right,” and he disappeared behind the cover of the out-house near which he stood. It was useless to follow him, and I returned to the front of the cottage, wondering what meaning the lad intended to convey by his words. I found the others already mounted, and swinging into my saddle I started off, still deep in thought upon the incident.

“ What weighty matter is engrossing the attention of Señor Wildash ?” asked the señorita.

I looked up, to see her regarding me with laughter in her large, dark eyes. No good could be gained by telling her of the lad’s strange utterance, which might only serve to render her uneasy. I answered as lightly as I could :

“ Señor Wildash is not a sufficiently great person to be

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

harassed by weighty matters. It was only a trifling one that occupied his thoughts."

"The trifling matter was, then, doubtless, the safe conduct of two women, which he was beginning to find too great a strain for him. Take heart, señor! To-night, if all goes well, you will be relieved of the charge which weighs you down so greatly."

The señorita seemed to be in excellent spirits, and, indeed, it was not to be wondered at. The thunder-storm of the previous evening had cleared the air, a pleasant breeze was blowing, and the sun shone from an unclouded sky. I, too, was soon affected with her light-heartedness, and, dismissing the uneasy reflections aroused by the lad's mysterious words, I answered in a similar vein :

"The señorita seems as pleased at the prospect of escape from my supervision as she thinks I am to be relieved of it. But," I added, in a more serious tone, "there will be a feeling of regret mingled with the feeling of relief when I have finished my task successfully."

The señorita glanced at me, and was silent for a moment. Then she said :

"I shall never forget, Señor Wildash, how much you have done for me these last few days."

It was certainly not my wish to extract from the young girl any expressions of gratitude for such services as I had been able to perform, and I quickly changed the conversation to some general topic. The señorita responded in her former light-hearted manner, and under the charm of her cheerful mood the time passed so rapidly that I was surprised when Rodrigo respectfully suggested that we might stop for lunch, as it was already one o'clock.

We took it beneath the shade of a small copse, which sheltered us completely from the heat of the sun, but was not large enough to prevent the air from circulating

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

freely through it. The fare was inviting—for, as a set-off against the size of the bill, I insisted on the woman at the cottage supplying us with good food for our mid-day meal—and we all did justice to it. The señorita still remained in the best of spirits, and once or twice I caught Isabel rallying Rodrigo in a manner which threw that gallant seaman into hopeless and irretrievable confusion.

At two o'clock we set out on the final stage of our journey to Valdivia. Our path ran once more through a mountainous, wooded district, where the narrow track necessitated our riding in single file. Whether it was due to the gloomy effect of the heavy foliage, or merely to a reaction after her gay mood of the morning, the señorita became very silent and seemed depressed. It was not till nearly five o'clock, when we crossed a small stream and ascended a hill, that we at length emerged from the woods.

"I am very glad to be in the open once more," said the señorita, smiling for the first time since entering the forest.

"Yet you would have found it very exhausting to have ridden the whole distance in the heat of the afternoon sun," I said.

"Perhaps so," she answered, "but the woods depressed me, they were so dark and gloomy. I had a sort of prescience that something would happen to us there, but the open daylight has chased away the feeling," and she gave a little sigh of relief.

On the top of the hill we found that Carlos had halted at a place where the road forked, one branch turning sharply to the left and descending into a wooded valley, while the other crossed an undulating country almost in the same direction as that in which we had been travelling.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"There is Valdivia!" said Carlos, pointing over the undulating country to a plain beyond, in which I saw, in the hazy distance, a small gray patch, extending across a winding steel-colored path, which I knew must be the river.

The señorita's eyes sparkled.

"In another two hours, Carlos," she said, "we shall be safely there."

"Yes, señorita, if we do not waste time," he answered, leading the way along the road to the right.

We set off at a brisk trot, for the road was good, and the sight of our goal made every one anxious to reach it as soon as possible. It was not till we had covered at least half a mile that the warning which I had received from the boy suddenly came back to me. "After crossing the stream, do not take the road to the right." The only stream we had seen that day had just been crossed, and of the two branches into which the road had forked we had taken the one to the right. Without a moment's hesitation, I cried out loudly:

"Halt!"

"What is the matter?" exclaimed the señorita in astonishment, as we pulled up our horses, and Carlos, having come to a stand-still, looked wonderingly round.

"I fancy we have taken the wrong road, señorita!" I answered, beckoning Carlos to me. He came back with interrogation written plainly on his features.

"We ought to have taken the road to the left, Carlos," I said.

"What makes you think that, señor?" he responded.

I hesitated. It was useless, I decided, to alarm the señorita by telling him before her what the boy had said to me. On the other hand, I might alarm her still more if I showed that I was anxious to keep our conversation secret from her by taking him aside, apart from the fact

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

that he would in all probability laugh at the story. Accordingly, I answered :

"I have reason for believing that it would have been best to have taken the road to the left."

Carlos looked at me keenly, and then led the way to the top of a little eminence at the side of the road.

"There is Valdivia," he said, pointing to the spot where the town was still visible, in the direction in which we had been travelling, "and there runs the road to the left!" indicating a track running at right angles to our present course, and passing through a densely wooded country.

"I suppose it is possible to get to Valdivia by that road?" I said, resolutely, looking Carlos in the face.

"It is possible, señor," he replied, meeting my look with unwavering eyes, "if you are on good terms with the robbers who infest that district, and they choose to let you pass."

The señorita, who had followed us on to the mound, and who was at my side, shuddered at these words.

"Pray do not take us into those terrible woods again, Señor Wildash!" she exclaimed; "I know something will happen to us if we enter them!"

It was hard to resist her pleading, but the boy's words were still ringing in my ears.

"We are armed, señorita," I answered, "and could doubtless hold our own. We must take the road to the left! Lead the way back, Carlos!"

But Carlos did not move.

"If señor chooses to run the risk, and take others with him, I cannot prevent it. But as I do not wish to be taken prisoner by the bandits, my intention is to follow the direct route to Valdivia."

His calm refusal to accompany us maddened me, and my hand leaped to the hilt of my sword. He saw the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

action, and stood his ground unflinchingly. A moment's reflection sobered me, and I saw that matters would be no better, but a good deal worse, if I ran him through the body. The conviction that my purpose had been checkmated was gradually borne in upon me. I signified my abandonment of the design with ill enough grace, and we again took the road from which I had attempted to escape.

I trotted on for a long time in silence, brooding over the reverse I had sustained. I was conscious, however, that the señorita kept regarding me furtively, as though she wished to speak, and at length she said :

“Señor Wildash !”

The voice, which had become so familiar to me the last few days, moved me strangely, but, determined to visit my discomfiture on some one, I hardened my heart, and without looking at her, answered:

“What is it, señorita ?”

There was a short pause, and then in low tones, as though she felt the rebuke administered in my reply, she said :

“You have some good reason, señor, for wishing to take the other road ?”

“In truth, señorita,” I retorted, bitterly, “or I should not have pressed the matter.”

A still longer pause ensued, broken once more by the señorita’s voice.

“I am very sorry, señor, to have expressed my foolish fears about the road. You have good reason to be angry with me, and I can do nothing to repair my error except—except to say that I am willing to follow you by that, or any other road which you think best.”

A break in her voice made me look up and see that her eyes were full of tears. The sight filled me with remorse.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Forgive me, señorita ! I had no right to answer you so roughly. My temper was roused by Carlos's refusal to do as I bade him. However, I could not compel him to do so, and it would have been useless to take the other road without a guide. Besides, after all, he may be right," I reluctantly admitted.

After this, matters resumed their former footing between us. The señorita seemed anxious to divert my thoughts from the incident which had aroused my anger, while I wished to atone for the roughness of which I had been guilty. This softer mood became her infinitely more than either the imperious or gay one, and that last afternoon of our journey to Valdivia will always be the most cherished memory of my long life.

The sun was sinking on the distant horizon as we descended a little wooded hollow in the road. Carlos said that on reaching the top of the hill on the other side of the hollow we should join, he thought, a main road running straight down into Valdivia, but that he would go on and reconnoitre, before it was too dark for him to see. The rest of us followed at a walk. As we became enveloped in the deep shadow of the trees, the señorita could not restrain a little shudder.

"How thankful I shall be, señor," she said, "when we have left the last of these dreadful woods behind us!"

Whether I had become infected with her fears, or whether it was merely the melancholy that comes at the end of a summer day, I, too, experienced for the first time a strange depression and foreboding. We rode silently on through the gloomy hollow, and were just beginning the ascent when a shrill whistle rang through the air. In a moment a score of men had leaped out from the wood on either side, and before I could draw my sword I was pulled out of the saddle and disarmed. Rodrigo had been similarly treated before my eyes, while

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Carlos was disappearing at full gallop over the top of the hill.

"The scoundrel!" I cried; "he has betrayed us!"

"Alas! señor," said the señorita, who, now that the worst had come, retained her composure with admirable courage, "you must blame me also for this disaster that has fallen on us."

CHAPTER XX

AFTER this, as it seemed to me, conclusive evidence of Carlos's treachery, I was hardly surprised to recognize in the leader of the band of robbers who attacked us the half-breed at whose cottage we had spent the previous night. The voices I heard outside the stable door belonged, of course, to Carlos and this man, who were probably arranging the details of the capture. The boy, who must have overheard the conversation, was anxious, perhaps out of hatred to his master, to warn me of the danger, while Carlos's refusal to take the road to the left was now easily explained.

One part of the programme, however, seemed to have miscarried, for I soon heard the half-breed, whom his fellows called Pedro, complaining loudly about the loss of his pony.

"Why could not some of you empty numbskulls have stopped that man on the pony? I did not reckon on his riding off like that. Now, I suppose, I shall never see it again."

They all made various excuses, and then Pedro, with an oath, turned from them to us.

"I shall make up the loss of my pony somehow. Turn out your pockets, sefior!"

I did so, with the result of displaying the smallest piece in the Chilian currency. Pedro waved it angrily aside.

"You will soon learn not to trifle with me, sefior!" he said. "Come, let me have all the money you possess, and waste no time about it!"

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

"That is all I have," I answered. "You forget that I paid you two hundred and fifty pesetas for the pony, and one hundred pesetas for the night's lodging."

There was some laughter at Pedro complaining of the loss of his pony when he had already been paid for it, and, seeing that he could get nothing from me, he turned his attention to Rodrigo, from whom he only obtained a few pesetas. To my surprise he did not demand from the women either their purses or their jewelry.

The march was now commenced, the señorita and Isabel being allowed to retain their seats on horseback, while Rodrigo and I were compelled to go on foot. I was hoping from this that the señorita would be well treated, in expectation of the large ransom which would be demanded for them, till a few chance words I heard filled me with dismay. Two men who walked beside me were discussing the capture, when one of them said :

"Why did not Pedro take the señoritas' purses?"

"It was Benavides' orders," the other answered. "Don Guido had desired that the women should not be molested."

In spite of all my efforts, then, Don Guido, through the agency of the notorious Benavides, with whom he was evidently in league, had succeeded in effecting our capture. Rodrigo and myself would probably be left in the bandit's hands, to be disposed of as he thought fit. The women would be sent back to the castle of Monzana. Fortune had indeed set her face against us, to suffer our capture when on the point of reaching the haven for which we had set out.

Pedro led the way up the hill by which Carlos had galloped off, and on gaining the top turned to the right along a rugged mountain track. A blood-red sun was

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

setting behind the hills to the west, and Valdivia lay in the valley beneath, only some five or six miles distant. Chilian patriots held the town, and a large garrison was in occupation. If they could only see us now being led captive by the robbers, in a few hours they could set us free. As I turned away from the sight with a heavy heart, I found the señorita looking towards me with an appealing glance. Feeling that she still regarded herself as the cause of our misfortune, I smiled back to her, to show that I kept a good heart, and had nothing to reproach her with.

Darkness soon fell, and, being unfamiliar with the path, I stumbled frequently, provoking every now and then a coarse burst of laughter from the Indians who guarded me. The track took a gradual winding ascent in the direction of a range of hills. I will not describe the miseries of that march, the thought that, after all, I had failed to save the señorita from Don Guido's hands, the bitter regret I felt at not having acted in accordance with the warning the boy had given me, and the physical pain of the tedious tramp along a rough path for one who had not walked for many weeks. It is enough to say that, after a two hours' journey, a turn in the path revealed a spot above us which was evidently illumined by camp-fires, though the fires themselves were hidden from our view by a projecting ledge of rock.

The path now became extremely steep and narrow, leading finally to a fissure in the rocks, which could only be passed in single file. The approach was very difficult, and on this side, at any rate, Benavides' stronghold seemed impregnable. At the end of the fissure an Indian stood on guard. Receiving the watchword from Pedro, he drew aside to let us pass, and we entered the robbers' camp. In the ruddy light of three large camp-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

fires, Indians could be seen hurrying towards us, eager to learn the value of the latest prize. Some little distance in front of the fires the ledge ended in an abrupt descent. At their back stood several stone and wooden buildings, overshadowed by a lofty rock. Benavides had indeed showed judgment in the spot he had chosen for his stronghold.

Pedro halted us when we reached the centre of the camp, and dismissed all except two of our guard. Then, helping the women to dismount, he sent a message to apprise the captain of our arrival. A short interval elapsed before the door of the central stone building opened and a man in the ordinary attire of a Chilian peasant emerged from it. The light of the central campfire fell full upon him as he approached us, and I thought I had never seen a more repellent figure. Of medium height, his left arm hung loosely from the shoulder, as though he had lost control of the muscles, while his head was drawn to the same side with every appearance of paralysis.

The story of his attempted execution now came back to me—how, after a dozen men had been drawn up and discharged their muskets at him, he had fallen prostrate to the ground, and how the officer, wishing to make sure of the death of such a scoundrel, had drawn his sword across his throat, leaving him for dead by the roadside. But Benavides, not having yet completed the full measure of his atrocities, was destined to survive. In spite of the gash in his throat, a bullet through his left shoulder, and another shattering his left arm and permanently disabling it, he recovered consciousness and managed to crawl to a cottage, where an old woman dressed his wounds. It was owing to her unskillful treatment that the muscles of his neck on the left side contracted, giving the appearance of a paralytic stroke.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Such was the man who stood before us in the light of the camp-fire, regarding us narrowly with his keen black eyes and yellow, impassive countenance. At length he said to Pedro :

"This, then, is the party that Don Guido was in search of. Had they much money on them?"

"I did not take the señoritas' purses, as you gave me orders not to molest them. One of the men had a few pesetas on him, and the other only a ten-cent piece."

Benavides frowned.

"Which is Señor Wildash?" he asked.

I told him that was the name I bore.

"So it was you who thought you could capture the castle of Monzana with a score of men? It would take at least five times that number to storm the place. Have you many friends in Valdivia?"

"Such friends as I have are in the Chilian navy," I answered.

"There is none of the fleet at Valdivia now. Do you know any one else in the town?"

"Major Beauchef," I responded.

Benavides' look hardened, and he said :

"I am glad to meet a friend of Major Beauchef's. There are one or two acts of kindness on his part towards me which I should like to repay. I shall be discharging a part of the debt when I have you shot."

I had hardly expected so merciful a death, and was proportionately relieved. Meanwhile Benavides asked Rodrigo who he was.

"I am the señor's servant," he answered.

"Have you any friends at Valdivia who would pay a ransom for you?"

Rodrigo replied that he had no friends at that town, and that even if he had he would not trouble them.

Benavides scowled, and said to Pedro :

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

"Have these two men shot in half an hour. I will come and witness it." Then, turning on his heel, he re-entered his quarters. I had heard an exclamation of horror escape the señorita's lips, but I dared not meet her eyes, and was about to follow Pedro when Benavides stopped and said to the half-breed :

"When did Don Guido say he would be here?"

"At sunset to-morrow, captain!" Pedro answered.

"Do not shoot the prisoners till he comes, then. He might not care to pay the price he promised if he found them dead. Put the two men in irons, and tell old Maria to lock the señoritas up with her."

Pedro went away and presently returned with a bent and wrinkled old hag, to whose mouth a couple of projecting teeth—the only ones visible—gave the appearance of a perpetual smile. She looked up at us in turn with her watery eyes, and then, hobbling towards the señoritas, she beckoned to them with a withered forefinger, saying :

"Come along with me, my dears! This open camp is not the place for such pretty creatures as you to spend the night. Come along with old Maria, and she will see you safely locked up."

I was unable to whisper a farewell word to the señorita, or even to see where she was taken to, for Pedro told the two men who still remained on guard to march us off to the guard-room. This was an ill-made wooden shed, evidently used as a prison, fetters for the wrists and ankles hanging from the walls. We were shackled with a pair of each, and then Pedro bade us make ourselves comfortable for the night, and not to attempt to escape, as there would always be a sentry at our door.

It may be imagined that there was little sleep for Rodrigo and myself that night. By the light of a dingy old lamp we made our way to the only bench in the hut and

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

sat down upon it. Then followed a long silence, which Rodrigo was the first to break.

"I see no chance of escape, señor," he said.

"I am afraid that there is none," I answered. "The garrison at Valdivia is evidently not strong enough to keep the robbers out of the neighborhood, though, from what Benavides said, it seems as if they had made one or two attempts to do so."

The topic afforded food for reflection, and it was some time before Rodrigo spoke again.

"I cannot believe, señor, that Carlos played us false. Appearances may be against him, but I still have faith in him."

"Who was it, then, whom I overheard talking with Pedro outside the stable door? and who but Carlos could have told them to lie in ambush on the very road we took?"

Rodrigo only shook his head. "I cannot explain it, señor, any more than I can believe him guilty."

I then told him for the first time of the warning I had received, and he mused on it for some time. At length he said :

"What is done, señor, cannot be undone. Don Guido may have laid many other traps for us besides the one into which we fell, and we can only hope Benavides will shoot us outright instead of torturing us first."

I did not answer, and presently, in spite of my impending fate and the hardness of the floor on which I stretched myself, I fell asleep.

Daylight was pouring in through the ill-fitting planks of the hut when I awoke, and the robbers' camp was already astir. About an hour later, to my surprise, an Indian brought us some coffee and coarse country bread. It seemed that Benavides did not starve the prisoners he meant to shoot. I cannot describe how wearily that

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

day dragged on. Neither of us were in the mood for conversation, and my thoughts were such poor companions that I almost longed for the hour at which they would lead us out to be shot, and so put an end to all my sufferings.

The hour came at last. At five o'clock Pedro opened the door and summoned us. We went out to find a dozen Indians drawn up with muskets, their cruel countenances betraying a grim satisfaction at the work before them. Pedro led the way towards Benavides' quarters, and, halting us outside, he entered. Then came an interval of suspense, during which I suffered more mental agony than had fallen to my lot in the whole twenty-four hours of my captivity. It was, perhaps, part of Benavides' systematic cruelty to make those whom he condemned to death pass through this ordeal.

Half an hour may have gone by—though it seemed to me two hours—and still no one issued from Benavides' door. I began to feel sick and faint, for we had been given nothing to eat or drink since seven o'clock that morning. My head was swimming, and I suppose I tottered, for the sergeant in command stepped forward and led me to a bench underneath the window of a wooden hut on the right-hand side of Benavides' quarters. Rodrigo was placed beside me, and then the man brought us a can of water. We each took a long draught of it, and I felt better. The sergeant understood that his prisoners must not be too weak to stand up and meet their fate.

Suddenly the captain's door opened, and my heart bounded at the sound. But only Pedro came out, and he strolled to the southern side of the camp with a telescope in his hand, with which he began to leisurely survey the country which lay before him. I noticed

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

that most of the men were looking in the same direction, and I wondered vaguely what was attracting their attention. Then the truth flashed suddenly upon me. The approach of Don Guido and his party had been observed, and we had been taken out of the guard-room to be shot as soon as he arrived.

Another terrible interval of waiting followed. The sun was setting in a golden glory above the distant hills, a gentle breeze was blowing, and a song-bird, perched in a small tree growing in the fissure of the rock behind us, was pouring out his rich notes upon the evening air. I hated nature for watching so peacefully and contentedly the human tragedy about to be enacted, and I turned my eyes upon the ground at my feet, trying to shut out the lovely view before me.

As I sat there, idly watching an ant struggling with an object some five times larger than itself—and it is curious that on such occasions, when the nervous system is strained to the uttermost, the brain still finds time to note the smallest trifles—I felt a hand upon my shoulder, and looked up to see before me one of the Indians who formed my guard. He glanced rapidly round to where Pedro was still standing with his back to us, and then said, hurriedly:

“Señor, I can do you a service if you make it worth my while.”

I thought the fellow was mocking me.

“There is no service,” I answered, “that you can do a man who will be dead at sunset.”

“Yes, there is, señor!” he went on, rapidly. “You do not know Benavides’ mode of execution. He gives orders for the men to fire only at the legs and arms, and then he takes his sword and—” the Indian drew his finger across his throat to indicate the death by which the victim died.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The prospect of being killed like a pig by this inhuman monster was enough to make one's blood run cold, but I had no money to purchase a quicker death, and told the Indian so. When he found that he could get nothing from me, he drew back into the ranks, saying, with a malicious grin, before he went :

"Very well, señor, you shall die your own way! Benavides is not a skilful slaughterer, in spite of all his practice, and he often makes three or four attempts before he is successful."

It is a merciful provision of nature that, when a nervous strain becomes too great to bear, a kindly anaesthetic in the form of a numbness of the senses falls upon the sufferer. I hardly heard what the fellow said, and waited in a sort of dull stupor for the end. And soon a stir among the men at the south side of the fort showed that the party they watched were drawing near. Pedro came and called Benavides, who walked in that direction to receive them, while the hinged sun-shutter of the window above me was thrown back, old Maria's shrill tones becoming audible as she addressed the captives within the building :

"He will soon be here now, my dears, and no doubt, whatever you may pretend, you will be glad to see him. He is a gallant Spanish gentleman, is Don Guido Villamil, and worth twenty of your puling patriots!" Then, catching sight of us, she went on : "They have brought out the two prisoners already, with a dozen men drawn up to shoot them, so they will be executed as soon as he appears."

She ended with a ghoulish laugh, and then on the still evening air there rang out from beneath the camp, with startling suddenness, the report of some two or three score muskets, and the scene underwent a sudden transformation. Benavides, his face distorted with passion,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

shouted for our guards, who alone were armed with muskets. The rest were running in all directions to procure their firearms, and everywhere was panic and confusion.

I wondered what had happened. Could it be that Don Guido's party had been fired upon by some mistake, and had been stung into retaliation? I rose to my feet and attempted to walk to some spot from which I could discover what was going on. But the heavy irons round my ankles made movement painful, and I had not strength enough to get beyond a small tree in the centre of the fort. Leaning against this, I watched the fight.

The assailants were evidently in large force, if one could judge by the continuous rattle of their musketry. Already three Indians were stretched lifeless on the ground, while at least a dozen had been wounded. Benavides, to do him justice, was no coward, and was continually exposing himself, as he tried to get his men to stand their ground. Pedro, too, fought bravely, till I saw him throw up his arms and fall headlong to the ground. His death still further discouraged the already wavering Indians, and when one of their number came running from the other side of the camp, and shouted that the enemy were approaching in that direction also, a general flight ensued, every one making for a narrow, zigzag path in the rock behind the camp.

Benavides stayed till the last, and then, finding that he was deserted, turned and moved in the direction of this path. There were no signs of panic in his bearing, and in my central position I was unfortunate enough to catch his eye. If he could not defeat the enemy, he could at least prevent his prisoners from falling into their hands. Accordingly, with sword flourished in the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

air, and the look of malice in his evil eyes enhanced by the grotesque effect of his distorted neck, he rushed upon me. I raised my two hands, shackled together with the iron handcuffs, to protect myself, and I remembered nothing more.

CHAPTER XXI

MOST of us have had experience of that borderland which exists between the state of sleep and the full awakening of the senses. In this neutral territory it is often difficult to separate fact from fancy, to tell exactly where the dream comes to an end and where reality commences. In the present instance, as consciousness returned to me, I have an indefinite remembrance—though it might have been merely the offspring of my imagination—of small, deft fingers unshackling the fetters round my wrists and ankles, and chafing the ribbed and swollen flesh beneath them. Then a towel, dipped in cold water, and applied gently to my burning head, gave me a sense of exquisite relief, and I opened my eyes to find two soft, dark ones bent upon me, a look of keen anxiety in their troubled depths.

But as soon as the señorita—for it was she—saw that I was conscious, a smile replaced the anxious look.

“Are you badly wounded, señor?” she asked, in her low, sweet voice.

I made an effort to rise, but sank back again, for I had not yet sufficiently regained my strength. The señorita applied a flask to my lips, and, the stimulant reviving me, I became conscious of one or two other figures around me. Among them, I could hardly believe my eyes when I recognized our late guide, Carlos. I suppose a look of anger must have mingled with my expression of astonishment, for the señorita said :

“Yes, señor, this is Carlos, to whom we owe our safety,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

for he galloped off to Valdivia and brought the troops which rescued us."

Rodrigo was, then, justified in his faith in our guide.

"I have wronged you, Carlos," I said, "and ask your forgiveness for having done so."

But Carlos would not allow that there was anything to forgive, and a couch being now brought out from Benavides' quarters he assisted the others in putting me on to it. I was still in the centre of the camp, beneath the tree where the robber chieftain found me, but instead of swarming, ill-conditioned Indians, some score of patriot soldiers were in possession of the place. As to my wound, it seemed that Benavides' sword had been turned by the iron shackles on my uplifted hands, and had descended almost flat upon my head with force enough to stun me, though the flesh was barely cut. In fact, my unconsciousness was due as much to weakness as the blow, and the señorita now supplying me with food, I soon regained my strength, and was able to listen to the story of the capture of the robbers' stronghold.

It appeared that Carlos reached Valdivia soon after sunset on the previous evening, and applied at once to the governor for troops to rescue us. The governor referred him to Major Beauchef, who commanded the garrison. That officer was much astonished to hear that I was one of the prisoners, as he had been informed by some of my men who escaped from the expedition to Monzana that I had been killed in a second attack upon the castle. He made preparations at once for our relief, but could not send any troops that night, as the garrison was undermanned and awaiting reinforcements on the morrow. These arrived at ten o'clock in the morning, and by noon the relieving force set out, under the command of Major Beauchef himself.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

In order to take Benavides by surprise, it was necessary to make a long détour towards the south, and the success of this movement was mostly, if not wholly, due to the fact that Don Guido was expected from the same quarter, and that the uniform of the Spanish and patriot soldiers did not differ so greatly as to be distinguished from each other in the distance. It was only when Major Beauchef and his men had drawn quite near that Benavides discovered his error, and then it was too late. The camp was taken by storm, with the loss of only one man killed and half a dozen wounded, and the greater portion of the patriot troops were now engaged, under the direction of the major himself, in pursuit of the fugitives. Rodrigo, it appeared, had received no injury, for on the outbreak of the fight he had gone to Pedro's room to secure the key which unlocked the shackles. Old Maria had been one of the last to fly, thus confining the señorita and her maid till the struggle was almost finished.

From the officers left in command of the soldiers I heard that Major Beauchef intended to come back to the camp for the night, and at ten o'clock he returned from the pursuit with about a dozen prisoners, among them old Maria. I was not sorry to think that the term of imprisonment to which she would be sentenced would probably silence her tongue for several years to come. Benavides, however, had escaped. The major, who, on capturing the camp, had seen me lying on the ground, and who had given me up as dead for the second time, greeted me very heartily on finding that I was still alive. He expressed his regret at failing to capture the man who had struck me down, but said that he had followed the fugitives as far into the rugged mountain fastnesses as he had deemed it prudent to take his men.

The following morning, after a good night's rest, I felt almost myself again, and at ten o'clock we set off for

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Valdivia under a well-armed escort. Major Beauchef, with the main body of his men, intended to scour the country for fugitives and return to the town at nightfall. It was a lovely morning, and as we drew nearer and nearer to our destination my spirits rose. I was glad to feel that the señorita would now be beyond Don Guido's reach. She herself, however, was not in an equally gay mood, and at length became so silent that I said :

“ Does not the prospect of reaching Valdivia please you, señorita ? ”

She gave a little sigh, and, without looking at me, answered :

“ I am pleased to think that I am safe away from Monzana Castle, and shall always be very grateful to you, señor, for having enabled me to escape, but—”

She paused, and then, as I said nothing, and was evidently waiting for her sentence to be concluded, she went on :

“ The last time, señor, that I was in Valdivia, I had great hopes of being of service to the cause of Spain, but now I have begun to see that I can effect scarcely anything in her behalf.”

“ It is a pity, señorita, that your sympathy is not bestowed upon a different nation.”

“ Spain is the nation, señor, from which my family sprang, and the fact that a Don Guido belongs to it does not alone prove it to be unworthy of support. But I have no one left to help me in my efforts. My poor mother is dead, and Don Luis is away ! ”

The mention of Don Luis gave me food for thought, and I wondered how long his sense of duty to the Spanish cause would keep him at Monzana Castle now that his cousin had deserted it. I was also anxious to learn the señorita's own intentions, and I said :

“ Have you made any plans for the future, señorita ? ”

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"I shall stay with some friends in Valdivia till I can get a ship for Valparaiso. And you, señor?"

"I also must return to Valparaiso."

Her face brightened.

"I shall be staying here with Señora Aranguez, in the Calle Ferdinand. Would señor be kind enough to call there and let me know when the next ship sails?"

I promised to do so, and as we had now entered Valdivia, I parted with the señorita at the door of her friend's house, and went on with Rodrigo to take up my quarters at the inn where I had left my baggage on setting out with the expedition to Osorno. After I had changed my clothes and provided Rodrigo with an old suit—for we were still wearing the Chilean peasant costume—I went to the bank and cashed a draft on my Valparaiso bank. I then paid a visit to a tailor and, while replenishing my own stock, provided Rodrigo, who had lost everything, with an entirely new outfit. This ended the morning's work, and we returned to the inn with excellent appetites for our mid-day meal.

My next duty was to report myself at headquarters, and in the afternoon I set out for the governor's house. From him I learned that the Chilean fleet was again blockading Callao, and that before I had been reported dead Lord Cochrane had sent orders to Valdivia for me to join the flag-ship in my former position as flag-lieutenant. A gunboat was leaving Valdivia on the following day for Callao, and my quickest way would be to take a passage in her.

The prospect of once more fighting by the admiral's side filled me with enthusiasm. My only fear was that I might be too late for the final blow, which I felt convinced he had been meditating. Accordingly, I arranged at once about my passage in the gunboat, and, returning to the hotel, made preparations for departure. Rodrigo, whom, of course, I decided to take with me, was de-

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

lighted with the prospect of some more sea service. He had had enough soldier's work, he said, to last him the whole of his life, and he set about packing my clothes with great alacrity.

That evening I made inquiries about the next ship sailing to Valparaiso, and found that there would not be one for a week. I wondered if the señorita would regret my being unable to accompany her. For myself, I felt that it was just as well that duty called me away, and that I should have plenty to occupy my time for many weeks to come. Don Luis, doubtless, would soon make his appearance, and then the señorita would remember me no more.

The following morning I was in my room at the inn, seeing that everything was ready before I went to pay my farewell visit to Carita Montenar, when I heard Isabel's voice on the landing, on which my door opened.

"Where is your master?" she said to Rodrigo.

"In his room. What is it you want?" he asked, in tones which betrayed a mixture of his habitual bashfulness with women and a strenuous desire to watch over my interests.

"I have a letter for him," continued Isabel.

"I will take it," was Rodrigo's answer.

"No, indeed!" retorted Isabel. "I cannot trust a man to do my errands. Which is his room?"

"He may not be able to see you now."

"Then I must wait till he can see me," answered Isabel, in tones of patient resignation.

Rodrigo saw that it would never do to keep her waiting, and, vanquished by her woman's wit, he knocked at my door and announced her.

"I have a letter for you from the señorita," said Isabel, as she entered, holding out the missive to me.

Asking her to wait, I opened it and read as follows:

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Is it true that you are leaving Valdivia to-day for Callao ? I can hardly believe that you go at such short notice ; but, if so, will you find time to call on me, even if it is only for a few minutes ?

"CARITA MONTENAR."

I wrote a hurried note to say that I would come at once, and turned to give it to Isabel. She had, however, withdrawn outside, and was engaged in rallying the hapless boatswain.

"So you are running away to-day, Rodrigo, are you ? You sailors make a mistress of the sea, and, though you may leave her for a week or two, you always hasten back to her, forgetting every one you leave ashore ?"

Rodrigo must have felt that this description applied accurately enough to him, though he tried to stammer a denial.

"No, Rodrigo," resumed the girl, in mock-reproachful accents, "you cannot deceive me. Is it not true that at the bidding of this mistress you desert a girl in every port you touch ?"

I would have given a good deal to see Rodrigo's face. Rodrigo, who never spoke to a woman if he could help it, accused of the heartless intrigues of a seafaring Don Juan !

"Indeed, no, señorita !" he protested.

"Ah ! your eyes betray you. You cannot look me in the face. I might have known that you were only making sport of me these last three days. I might have guessed that all your oaths—"

Here Rodrigo gave utterance to a groan of such despair that I felt bound to go to the poor fellow's assistance, and Isabel, hearing me move, exclaimed :

"There is your master coming. Go and see if he has got a letter for me."

I opened the door, which was ajar, to find Rodrigo on the other side of it, a picture of helpless misery, with

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

beads of perspiration standing on his forehead. Isabel, quite cool and collected, took the letter with a pleasant smile, and, as I turned away, I heard her say in a low tone to Rodrigo :

“Good-bye, Rodrigo; you will forget poor Isabel !”

On leaving my room again to pay my visit to the señorita, I found Rodrigo leaning over the railing of the balcony, looking dejectedly into the court-yard beneath.

“You seem in poor spirits, Rodrigo,” I said ; “what is the matter ?”

“Nothing, señor, only I shall be very glad to get to sea again.”

“No love affair, I hope ?”

“No, señor ; that is—not on my side. But I believe that Isabel thinks—”

“Thinks what ?” I asked.

“Thinks that I have been paying her attention.”

“And what if you have ?”

“Me, señor ?” he echoed, in astonishment. “I never pay attention to women. Why, you know, señor, that I am almost afraid to speak to them !”

“You seem to have found your tongue with Isabel.”

“Do you really think, señor, that I have given her encouragement ?”

He seemed so prostrated by the thought that I felt bound to give him some relief.

“It looks like it, Rodrigo,” I said ; “but you have nothing to fear ! Isabel has a young man in Valparaiso, I believe.”

“I don’t see how that makes it any the better for me,” he answered, gloomily, as he moved off to give a finishing touch to the packages.

On asking for Señorita Montenar at the house of her friend in the Calle Ferdinand, I was conducted to a room on the farther side of the court-yard. The señorita, who

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

was alone, rose to meet me, and I, who had scarcely seen her except on board ship or out of doors, was struck by the charm she displayed in this new light.

"It is, then, true?" she said, after she had given me her hand. "You leave for Callao to-day? I see you have already donned your uniform."

"Yes, señorita," I answered, taking the seat to which she motioned me, "as I am going on a gunboat I am compelled to wear it."

"And you will not return to Valparaiso, as you said?" The señorita had taken a low chair near the window with her back to the light, and as she bent over some fancy work which she had taken up, though I could not read her expression, I fancied there was an accent of reproach in her tone.

"No, señorita, I received orders to join the fleet, and orders cannot be disobeyed."

There was a slight pause, and then she said, still without looking up:

"Are you glad, señor, to be on active service again?"

"Yes, señorita," I replied, feeling how much I should need something to occupy my thoughts, "I should indeed be at a loss if I had not some such work before me."

The señorita gave a little sigh.

"A man can always get distraction, and I suppose the most absorbing one is killing other men. In this case, señor, it is my countrymen you go to kill."

"No, señorita, I fight with your countrymen against the Spaniards."

"But there are many of my countrymen on the Spanish side, and theirs is the cause that I espouse."

"I wish it were, instead, the patriot cause that you upheld."

"My family traditions are all bound up with Spain, and I must not desert her. If she had Lord Cochrane

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

and his English officers on her side instead of on the other, she would gain an easy victory."

"The English have always been on the side of the oppressed," I said.

"Except in the case of her own colonies, señor," she answered. "But do not let us quarrel now, for I am greatly in your debt, and should not like to think that we had parted on bad terms. It may be the last time that we shall meet."

I felt that what she said was true. As soon as the war was over, perhaps before, I thought, she might be Don Luis's wife, and then a meeting would not be of my seeking.

"A ship sails for Valparaiso this day week," I said, remembering the information I had promised to impart. "Do you still intend to go?"

"Yes, señor, I must go there first, but only for a short time, on my way to my old home in Santiago."

"I wish every happiness may befall you there, señorita," I said, as I rose to go.

She rose also, and as she turned partially towards the light I fancied that her eyelashes glistened as though moist with tears. Women are emotional creatures, and perhaps in spite of her devotion to Don Luis she was really sorry to part with a friend who had been her companion on a hazardous journey for the last few days. The thought emboldened me to say :

"As we may not meet again, señorita, will you give me something to remind me of you—that rose you have—"

The señorita instantly unpinned a rose that she was wearing and gave it to me.

"You shall have it, willingly, señor," she said, "but it will be withered in a day and thrown away. Let me give you something that will last a little longer," and, after searching in her work-basket, she drew out a narrow strip

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

of colored ribbon, no longer than such as might be used for a medal or a clasp.

"These are the colors of the Montenars, señor. I will fix them inside the lapel of your coat, so that they will not be seen. Then, after the heat of battle, you may remember me, and be merciful to the Spaniards who fall into your power."

As she spoke she turned back the left lapel of my uniform coat and pinned the little strip of ribbon securely there. I watched her deft fingers at the work, her long eyelashes drooping as she fixed it, and I felt a sudden impulse to clasp her in my arms, and drive Don Luis from her thoughts. But the true dark eyes which she now raised to me made me ashamed of entertaining such a purpose, and she went on with a sweet smile:

"There, Señor Wildash, you wear my colors now, and you are my enemy no longer, although you fight against my kinsfolk, for I know the wounded and the prisoners will receive kind treatment at your hands."

I made a vow that they should do so, and, kissing the hand she gave me, I bade her farewell and went my way.

CHAPTER XXII

THE gunboat got under way at four o'clock that afternoon, and we were soon moving through the water at a very fair pace with all sails set before the southwest wind. I spent the first few hours in gathering all the information possible with regard to the intended movements of the fleet. But the officers of the gunboat could tell me little. The fleet, it appeared, had sailed from Valparaiso about a month previously, accompanied by transports containing some four thousand troops. Its destination was said to be Callao, to which port the captain of the gunboat had orders to proceed, after performing the commission on which he was sent to Valdivia.

We were, then, considerably surprised when, on arriving at the latitude of Pisco, we were met by a brig of war, which informed us that the fleet was lying at that port. Setting our course for it accordingly, we entered the harbor the same afternoon. As I wished to report myself at once to Lord Cochrane, I accompanied the captain, who was going to the flag-ship for the same purpose.

On reaching the *O'Higgins* we found the admiral pacing the quarter-deck alone. He seemed to lack his usual sprightly step and animated expression. As we approached he looked up at me and started. Then, recognizing my face at last, he advanced with outstretched hands.

"It is, then, really you, Wildash, and not your ghost," he said. "I had received a circumstantial account of

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

your death in some fighting in the expedition to Osorno. How did you manage to come to life again?"

"I was taken prisoner, my lord, but succeeded in escaping," I explained.

"You must dine with me to-night and tell me all about it. You will join my ship, of course. I was obliged to fill your place, but I have plenty of work for you to do. Get your baggage over to the *O'Higgins*, while I have a word with the captain of the gunboat here."

I wasted no time in effecting the transfer, bringing, of course, Rodrigo with me. By the time things began to look a little ship-shape in the cabin assigned to me, Lord Cochrane's servant called to say that dinner was ready and the admiral awaited me.

"We shall have a *tête-à-tête* dinner, Wildash," his lordship said, motioning me to the only place laid besides his own. "I want to hear your story without interruptions from other people. Besides, to tell you the truth, I am a little tired of these Chilian officers."

We chatted on ordinary topics during the meal, for the admiral said he would not spoil my dinner by making me begin my narrative at once, but when the cloth had been removed, and we settled into comfortable chairs over the wine, he bade me commence my story.

I told it as clearly and succinctly as I could, Lord Cochrane listening with attention, and now and then interrupting to make a comment or ask a question, full of his shrewd common-sense. When I had concluded, he said :

"Let us hope that Beauchef will make short work of this Don Guido Villamil, who gave you so much trouble. Well, in spite of all your hardships, you have been more fortunate than I."

I was surprised to hear him speak in such a strain.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Did they not give you a splendid reception, my lord, on arriving at Valparaiso after the capture of Valdivia?"

"The populace showed much enthusiasm, but my enemies had set the ministry against me. They would not give the sailors their arrears of pay, and tried to put their own nominee as captain of the flag-ship. I only got my way on both these points by sending in my resignation."

"They have little gratitude, my lord," I said, "seeing that the capture of Valdivia, as I have been told, enabled the government to negotiate a loan of one million sterling, without which they would have been bankrupt."

"Things are no better now," the admiral continued. "General San Martin, who is in command of the troops, insisted on being landed here, where they remain in idleness, though half their number could effect the conquest of Peru. This inactivity is demoralizing both the army and the navy, and if San Martin does not move soon I shall go off without him."

Lord Cochrane, now fully launched on the subject of his grievances, found plenty of matter to dilate upon, and it was nearly three o'clock in the morning before he would let me go.

I soon found that matters were quite as bad, if not worse, than the admiral had represented them. The soldiers ashore were subjected to all the physical and moral diseases produced by a long period of inactivity, while the sailors were becoming dissatisfied and querulous. If San Martin had not already proved himself a brave officer it would have seemed as if cowardice was at the bottom of his idleness. The delay could only be attributed to the friction certain to arise when two independent commands exist in one expedition.

It was not till nearly two months had passed away in this aimless inactivity that Lord Cochrane, by some very

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

strong expressions, at length induced San Martin to reembark for Callao. But on arriving here the general refused to land, and insisted on being taken to Ancon, which is as far north of Callao as Pisco is to the south of it. Lord Cochrane now determined to dissociate himself from such a colleague, and, after landing him and his men at Ancon, announced his intention of blockading Callao with the *O'Higgins*, *Independencia*, and *Lautaro*.

But he had a very different design in his mind than the lingering process of a blockade, and on the night we left Ancon he called me into his cabin and confided the plan to me. I confess that I was thunderstruck by the boldness, nay, as it would seem to most people, the foolhardiness of the conception. For it was none other than to cut out with boats the Spanish flag-ship *Esmeralda*, a frigate of forty guns, as she lay at her anchorage beneath the forts on shore.

The daring involved in this attempt will be understood when it is stated that the *Esmeralda* was defended by a huge boom with chain moorings, by armed blockships, and by no less than twenty-seven gunboats. She had a full complement of sailors and marines on board, and was under the cover of one hundred and sixty guns on shore. Such an undertaking would have seemed sheer madness in any other commander, but Lord Cochrane's previous achievements made me feel that success was not impossible. The storming of Valdivia, however, had shown the Spaniards how much Lord Cochrane would dare, and made the present attempt all the more difficult by having put them on their guard.

I felt bound to state all the difficulties that occurred to me, but my arguments were fully met at every point. It was evident that Lord Cochrane had not decided on the plan without having very carefully considered all its

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

risks, and he proceeded to unfold it to me, displaying his wonderful mastery over those minute details which, insignificant as they may appear, often mean the difference between victory and defeat.

In the first place, it was essential to choose a dark night, and in this respect the admiral was fortunate, for there would not be a moon for nearly a week. Then, muskets being clumsy weapons to carry when clambering up a ship's side, he decided that the men should only be armed with pistols and cutlasses. For the purpose of easily distinguishing friends from enemies, all the attacking party were to be dressed in white, with a blue band on the left arm. As it was necessary, also, to take possession of the rigging as soon as the ship was boarded, a certain number of sailors would be specially told off for the work.

"And whom will you put in command of the attack, my lord?" I asked.

"I shall lead in person," he responded, quietly.

This was yet another surprise for me. It is customary for a captain, and of course much more so for an admiral, to remain on his ship when any work is to be done in the boats, and Lord Cochrane had not led an attack of this kind since he was lieutenant in the English navy. Not even at Valdivia had he taken part in the assault, and the fact that he proposed to do so now showed how desperate he felt the venture to be.

We continued to discuss the matter far into the night, and when we parted Lord Cochrane said that he would make his purpose known by proclamation on arriving off Callao on the morrow.

The greatest enthusiasm prevailed among the men when it was announced that an attempt was to be made to cut the *Esmeralda* out, and that the admiral himself would lead the attack. The whole of the seamen and

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

marines instantly volunteered for the work, but as the boats would only accommodate about two hundred and forty men, a selection was made, consisting of one hundred and sixty sailors and eighty marines. The next three days were spent in preparation, making the boats ready, muffling the oars, cutting the white uniforms agreed upon. Then, on the fourth day, when everything was finished, in order to disarm the enemy's suspicions, the *Lautaro* and *Independencia* were sent out to sea, as if in pursuit of a hostile sail, while the *O'Higgins* alone remained, looking unusually harmless and peaceful.

The long day at length drew to an end, and as soon as it was dark the fourteen boats were manned. These boats were arranged in two divisions, which would both approach the *Esmeralda* at the same time, one under the command of Captain Crosbie, to steer for the starboard, and the other, under the command of Captain Guise, to make for the larboard side of the frigate. Lord Cochrane would lead the way in a separate boat, and in this craft I found myself seated, at the admiral's side. The night was pitch dark, and from the *O'Higgins* to the boom was a three miles' row. Our progress was necessarily slow, both on account of the muffled oars and because care had to be taken that the boats kept within touch of each other.

It has been remarked that there is no test of a man's courage so severe as that of being engaged in a surprise of the enemy by night. Darkness is the natural progenitor of fear, and many a brave soldier would sooner storm a well-defended fort in the daytime than be led against an unprotected camp at night. The terrors of darkness are still further augmented on the water, for the assailant has not only to fight his human enemy, but also the treacherous element on which he moves, and which may at any moment engulf him in its depths.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

For myself, I own to having experienced uneasy sensations on setting out on this occasion, and to have sorely felt the need of that two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage of which the exile of St. Helena claims to have been the sole possessor. Though accustomed by my profession to use my eyes by night, the darkness was so intense that I could not see the land. The northern point of the island of San Antonio had to be cleared before entering the harbor, and without any bearings this was no easy matter. Even a straight course was difficult to steer, for a compass could not be seen, and it would have been unwise to carry a light for the purpose.

Lord Cochrane, however, who held the tiller, seemed to have no misgivings as to the course he ought to take, and he must evidently have studied it very carefully beforehand. By eleven o'clock we were rounding the point of the island, and towards midnight we began to near the boom. The slightest sound might now betray us and bring down upon our boat the fire of the three blockships. The men rowed more and more slowly, silently dipping and raising the oars, the only sound being the dripping of the water from the muffled blades as they swept over the surface before another stroke. Sometimes, however, a sea-lion would splash loudly near us, and I felt that our approach would now be noticed. Sometimes an oar would turn up a sheaf of phosphorescent water, and in my eyes it shone like a blazing beacon to the enemy.

Lord Cochrane held on his way without uttering a word. If it is true that all men experience fear alike, but the brave ones manage to conceal it, the admiral carried the art of dissimulation to perfection. I shall never forget the excitement I felt on approaching the boom. When I think of it I can still hear the gentle trickling of the water from the muffled blades, and the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ripple of the wavelets against the massive boom, while in my nostrils I breathe again the air of Callao harbor, impregnated with a curious smell like decaying seaweed, which is peculiar to the bay.

I was speculating, as we glided through the opening in the boom, how many seconds would elapse before the stillness of the bay would be broken by roaring guns, and the darkness illumined by flashing tongues of flame, when a challenge from a guard-boat rang out ahead of us. We were alongside of it in an instant, and Lord Cochrane, springing to his feet, thrust his pistol in the officer's face, saying that if a sound were uttered he would shoot him dead. The man's mouth opened, but no cry came out of it, and, leaving his boat in charge of one of ours, which now overtook us, we set out again for the *Esmeralda*.

How it was that we were not discovered before reaching the frigate I shall never be able to rightly understand. The twenty-seven gunboats were lying all around her, and we had to glide under the stern of one and almost graze the bows of another in order to pass through them. Time after time I expected to hear the sudden raising of the alarm, and to find ourselves the centre of converging fires. But on each occasion we escaped unchallenged, as though the whole harbor, with the exception of the guard-boat we had captured, was sunk in a death-like sleep. After passing the gunboats, Captain Guise led his division round to the larboard side of the *Esmeralda*, while Lord Cochrane with the other division held on his course for the starboard side. In another minute we were alongside, and the admiral, after whispering to the crew, "No shouting, my lads, and only use your cutlasses," seized the main chains and clambered up the side of the ship.

So quickly did he reach the bulwarks that I had only

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

begun the ascent myself when he was knocked back into the boat again. The admiral had been struck by the butt end of a musket, and, although, as I afterwards heard, he fell on a rowlock pin, which entered his body, inflicting a nasty wound at the side of his spine, he was up again in an instant, and this time I clambered on to the bulwarks with him. A sentry discharged his musket at us, and we at once engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with the marines whom we found there.

Being quickly supported by our men on the starboard side, while those on the larboard side also made their appearance, a full minute, I think, could not have elapsed before we had cleared the portion of the deck immediately in front of us, and Lord Cochrane, hailing the foretop and maintop in turn, received an immediate answer from his men at each of them.

I was just about to make my way towards the bows, from which the sound of a fierce struggle was proceeding, when I saw Lord Cochrane pull out his handkerchief and commence to tie it round his thigh.

"Are you wounded, my lord?" I asked.

"It is nothing," he answered, "only a bullet through my thigh from the sentry who fired at us as we jumped on board."

I saw a thick streak of blood down the white trousers which he wore, and said :

"Let me take you to a sheltered spot, where your wound can be dressed. You will die of loss of blood, unless it is properly attended to."

"No, Wildash, it is not as bad as that. Besides, I must see to everything myself, as long as I am strong enough to do so."

As he would not be persuaded, I left him to go to the forecastle, where the uproar was still increasing. Here the Spanish sailors were making a determined stand,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

and it was not till we had charged them three times that they gave way. Meanwhile the forts on shore had been alarmed, and, in spite of their own men who were on board, they opened fire upon the *Esmeralda*. I returned at once to the portion of the ship where I had left Lord Cochrane, and found him leaning against a carronade, looking very pale, but still directing everything. As I reached him he turned to look at two foreign warships, which were anchored close to us, and which, he now observed, were hoisting position lights.

"Hoist exactly similar lights, Wildash," he said to me.

It was evidently a pre-arranged signal between the forts and the foreign warships in the harbor to prevent the latter being fired upon in case of an action, and Lord Cochrane, with his quick eye for such details, had determined to take advantage of it. In a short time I had the signal hoisted, with the effect of immediately slackening the fire of the forts upon us.

The final contest for the possession of the ship was being fought on the quarter-deck, where the Spanish marines were offering a most determined resistance. On arriving there, I found it to be a hand-to-hand fight with cutlasses, and, as the numbers were well-matched, the struggle was a desperate one. Throwing myself at once into the fray, I soon discovered that I had no mean antagonist; and as the light was bad where we were fighting, I gave ground step by step, so as to draw my adversary to a lamp which hung at the top of a companion. My astonishment was great when the light fell on my opponent's face and I recognized Don Guido Villamil.

The recognition was evidently mutual, for with his exasperating smile the Spaniard said :

"It is well met, Señor Wildash. We shall at last be able to settle old accounts."

Don Guido fought with a skill and energy which taxed

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to the full my powers of defence. There was an expression of grim resolve on his face, as if an opportunity for which he had been longing had at length arrived, and he meant to take advantage of it. For my part, as I watched his eyes to follow the direction of his cuts, the sight of his face recalled all the injuries I had suffered at his hands, and I grew cool and confident in my determination to be revenged on him at last.

A slight advantage which he gained at the commencement of the fight, when through carelessness on my part he had passed my guard and drawn first blood with a cut upon my shoulder, made him think that he had an easy task before him. But as time went on and he obtained no further success, he seemed to feel that if he did not conclude the matter speedily my patience would exhaust him, and he would lose the day. Accordingly, with a dangerous light in his eye, he began so vigorous an onset that I had the utmost difficulty to repel it. His sword seemed to flash from two or three directions at the same moment, and another cut showed that he had gained a further advantage.

If, however, I could only maintain my defence a little longer, I knew that he would be worn out by the supreme effort he was making, and my judgment soon proved correct. His strokes became less vigorous and true, and there was a wavering expression in his eye. I was only waiting my opportunity to strike the final blow, when a rush of wind threw me on my back, and my antagonist was carried out of my sight. A round shot from the Spanish forts had completed the task on which I was engaged, and Don Guido was killed, after all, by those of his own side.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE cannon-ball that killed Don Guido Villamil virtually decided the issue of the fight on the quarter-deck, for two Spanish marines were also struck down by it, and the others, being now outnumbered, were quickly over-powered. Those of the crew who were not killed or wounded escaped by jumping overboard, and within a quarter of an hour from the time when the first boat came alongside the *Esmeralda* we had gained possession of the frigate.

As soon as the struggle on the quarter-deck was over, I returned to the spot where I had left the admiral, to inform him that the ship was ours. He was, however, nowhere to be seen, and on inquiring for him I was told that he had been taken into a deck-cabin, where the doctor was attending to him, and that the command of the ship had devolved on Captain Guise.

The forts still continued their fire upon us, and when the two foreign war-ships cut their cables and began to drift away from their anchorage there no longer existed any doubt as to which was the *Esmeralda*, and every gun was trained upon us. Lord Cochrane's plan had been, after gaining possession of the *Esmeralda*, to capture the *Maypu*—a Spanish ship with a million dollars on board and three hundred pieces of artillery—seizing finally all the Spanish shipping in the harbor. But it required a man of the admiral's coolness and resource to carry out such an extensive programme, and Captain Guise, finding that the cannon-balls were falling uncom-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

fortably thick around him, followed the example of the foreign war-ships, and, cutting cable, drifted towards the entrance of the harbor.

On getting beyond the range of the fort guns, I received orders to clear the deck, sending the wounded along to the doctor and throwing the dead overboard. It was a tedious and repellent task. Our own men received my attention first, and, in spite of the obstinate resistance of the enemy, I found that we had only eleven killed and thirty wounded. The losses of the Spaniards were much larger, and from the number of marines lying dead on the quarter-deck I estimated that hardly any of them could have escaped.

Having cleared the main deck, I was descending the companion to the cabin, when I stumbled over a body at the foot of it. I took the lantern from one of the two men who accompanied me, and found it to be that of a young Spanish officer. I was on the point of telling the men to throw it overboard, when something in the gray, drawn features seemed familiar to me. I held the light to the face and scrutinized it carefully, till in a sudden wave of memory I recognized Don Luis Martinez. It seemed, then, that he had lost his life fighting for the cause which he espoused. It was a soldier's death, and perhaps the one he would have chosen.

Motioning to the two men to take him up on deck and throw him overboard, I realized how much his death might mean for me. The señorita would doubtless mourn him for a time, but she could not always prove inconsolable. Since I had parted with her she had never ceased to occupy my thoughts, and, when too late, I knew the hold which she had taken on my life. Now that Don Luis was dead, there was no reason why I should not seek her and try to win her love.

As the men were stumbling up the companion with their

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

burden, while I held the lantern up to light them, a patch of color became visible beneath my eyes, and I caught sight of the little piece of ribbon which the señorita had pinned within the lapel of my coat. In taking off the white jacket, for which there was no longer any need, I had unintentionally turned back the lapel of my uniform coat, exposing to view what had been pinned within it. The sight of it reminded me of my promise to the señorita, and I felt a sudden compunction in consigning Don Luis in this rough-and-ready manner to the waves.

"Stay a moment, there!" I cried to the men, who had now reached the top of the companion. "Have you got any canvas to sew that body up in?"

The men laid their burden down upon the deck and stared at me in astonishment.

"Sew the body up in canvas, señor?" repeated one of them—"why, it would take a week to get rid of the dead if we treated them all like that!"

"It does not matter how long it takes," I answered. "I wish officers to be buried in a manner becoming to their rank. Go and get some canvas."

I reached the top of the companion in time to hear the man, as he went, cursing "the dog of a Spanish officer, who by getting himself killed was giving all this trouble," and then I once more inspected Don Luis's face by the light of the lantern. My shock was great to find that he still breathed. He must have been only stunned, and the cool air on deck had revived him. Beyond a cut on the head, which had not injured the skull, I could find no other wound inflicted. As soon as the men returned with the canvas I had the young officer taken to the doctor, who was able to attend to him at once. He declared that the cut in itself was of no great consequence, and, having washed and sewn it up without the patient recovering

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

consciousness, he had him placed on a mattress, where his regular breathing showed that there was no immediate danger to be feared.

At dawn Captain Guise anchored the *Esmeralda* astern of the *O'Higgins*, and after the hard night's work we were enabled to obtain some rest. At noon, however, I was roused by a summons to Lord Cochrane. I found him installed in the captain's cabin, and, though pale and weak from loss of blood, his eye seemed as bright and clear as ever. He was sitting up in his bunk, and had evidently been dictating to his secretary, who was sealing some despatches at a table by his side.

"I am glad to see that you are none the worse for the fight, Wildash," he said. "As for myself, there is nothing much the matter with me, though that thole-pin has made a nasty wound. But I did not send for you to talk about my injuries. I want you to take these despatches to Valparaiso as quickly as you can in the gunboat in which you came to Pisco."

I signified my readiness to start with them at once.

"And as you are going to a place where the wounded can be well looked after," the admiral continued, "you might take as many of the bad cases as the gunboat will accommodate."

I thought at once of Don Luis.

"There is a young Spanish officer," I said, "who is badly wounded, and whom I would like to take back with me."

"A Spanish officer?" Lord Cochrane repeated, with questioning eyes. "Do you want to play the rôle of the good Samaritan, Wildash? Well, you can have your wish, as long as the poor beggar does not take the place of a more badly wounded patriot."

I thanked him, and, taking the despatches, as well as the instructions for the captain of the gunboat, I made

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

my way to the companion ladder. Standing by the side of it I was surprised to see Rodrigo.

"Why, I thought we left you on board the *O'Higgins* last night, Rodrigo?" I said.

Rodrigo looked round him uneasily, and, seeing that there was no one within earshot, he replied :

"It is true, señor, that I was not lucky enough to be one of those selected, as my name is not on the roll of either the sailors or the marines. But I was very anxious to be a member of the expedition, so I made myself a white suit with a blue band round the left arm like the rest, and when the boats were being manned I slipped into one of them without being noticed."

"But I did not see you during the action," I said, smiling at his stratagem.

"No, señor. I was careful not to let you do so, but I managed to see a good deal of the fun in spite of that," he answered, his eyes alight with pleasure at the recollection of the struggle.

"I am going to Valparaiso at once," I said, "in the gunboat which brought us from Valdivia. Go and get my things from the *O'Higgins*, and put them on board of her."

Rodrigo, ready as usual to go anywhere at five minutes' notice, left the *Esmeralda* for the *O'Higgins*, while I steered for the gunboat. After reading his instructions, the captain inspected the space at his command, and calculated that he could accommodate about a dozen wounded men. As there were not more than that number seriously injured, I saw that I should be able to take Don Luis, and returned to the *Esmeralda* to have him and the others transferred to the gunboat.

I found that Don Luis was still unconscious, and the doctor, although he still declared that there was nothing serious in the case, admitted that a change to a cooler

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

latitude would certainly do him good. The transhipping of the wounded was a tedious affair, as they had to be lowered into the boats one by one in extemporized stretchers. It was sunset before the last one reached the gunboat, and then at length the anchor was weighed and we set sail for Valparaiso.

The voyage down the coast dragged on very slowly, as it seemed to me, anxious as I was to deliver as soon as possible the despatches containing the news of Lord Cochrane's great achievement. The presence of the wounded, too, made the atmosphere depressing, for there were at least half a dozen very serious cases, three of which died before we had been a week at sea. Don Luis, although he regained consciousness the day after leaving Callao, lay in a dazed state, without once opening his mouth to make inquiries as to where he was, or where he was being taken to. This listless apathy was regarded by the doctor as a very bad sign, and he said that unless the patient could be induced to show some interest in what was going on, he could not answer for the recovery of his mental balance, or even of his physical health.

Alarmed by this report, and anxious to do all in my power to carry out my promise to the señorita, I established myself as his nurse, and saw that he took with regularity the medicine which the doctor made for him. It was cheerless work, for the young fellow took no more notice of me than if I had been an automaton invented for the sole purpose of ministering to his wants. Worst of all, his health did not improve, and I began to wonder whether it might not be my inexperienced nursing which retarded his recovery.

I was on the point of throwing up the position in despair, and seeing if other hands could be more successful, when an incident occurred which roused his dormant mental faculties. I had lifted him up one morning in his bunk to

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

rearrange his pillows, and was replacing him upon them, when I felt his hand on the lapel of my coat. I grew hot when I saw that he had turned it back, and was gazing intently on the narrow strip of ribbon pinned within it.

"Where did you get that?" he demanded, looking at me keenly.

"From your cousin, Señorita Montenar," I answered, in some confusion.

"Did she pin it there herself?"

"Yes," I replied.

He gazed at me searchingly for a moment or two, and then sank back upon his pillows. The incident gave me matter for reflection. He had evidently recognized the ribbon, and was surprised to learn that she had pinned it to my coat. Was there any special significance in such an act, or was it merely a fancy of his disordered brain?

Whatever might have been the cause, it is certain that Don Luis had received the stimulant required to rouse him from his apathy. The rest of the day, when I was with him, he seemed to be nervously conscious of my presence, though he still said nothing. The following morning, however, when I approached him, his eyes sought mine, and with a flush upon his cheek he said:

"It is very good of you, Señor Wildash, to take care of me like this. You could not do more for one of your own side than what you are doing for an enemy."

I told him that I hoped to get him quite convalescent by the time we reached Valparaiso, and then, as he seemed to be excited, I discouraged further conversation, and presently withdrew.

But during the next few days the young fellow improved so much in health that there was no reason to prevent him from discussing any topic that he wished, and his first questions related naturally to the *Esmeralda's*

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

fate. I told him that we had gained possession of her and taken her out of the harbor.

"I was asleep when the alarm was raised," he said, "but we all felt so secure from attack that even as I threw on my clothes and ran on deck I made sure that there was some mistake, and that I should find no enemy in sight. How you succeeded in boarding the ship, surrounded as she was by gunboats, I cannot understand. Was Don Guido among the wounded?"

"Don Guido was among the killed," I said.

The young fellow was silent for a time, and then he said:

"Don Guido was a brave soldier and served Spain well, though I never forgave his treatment of my cousin. You have seen her since she left the castle?" he added, while the color rose to his cheek.

I said that I had.

"She left while I was away on an expedition," he continued, "and I never knew what made her go. Don Guido told me nothing, and I have not heard since. It was only a week or ten days later that the castle was taken by a large body of troops from Valdivia, though Don Guido, Miguel, and myself contrived to escape and take boat to Chiloe."

"How did you get to Callao, then?"

"A Spanish brig was leaving for that port, and Don Guido and myself took passage on her. We arrived there while the Chilian fleet was still at Pisco. Miguel was left at Chiloe on some business of Don Guido's."

I was sorry that the scoundrel had escaped the fate which had fallen to his master.

"What position did you hold on board the *Esmeralda*?" I asked.

"Don Guido had influence enough to have me made a lieutenant of marines, while he was appointed first lieutenant of the ship. He thought it might yet be possible

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

to destroy the Chilian fleet, and he did all he could to induce the Spanish admiral to attack your ships whenever they were separated. But he was not listened to, and now the cause of Spain is altogether lost. Even my poor cousin will have to give up all hopes of the mother country retaining either Chile or Peru."

"You may still find life worth living, Don Luis," I said, "although the patriots have won the day. Your father, at any rate, will have cause for satisfaction."

The young fellow did not answer, but I fancy he felt by this time that his dreams of Spain's continued sovereignty must be finally renounced.

A week later we let go anchor in Valparaiso Bay. My first duty was to take the despatches to the governor, and, a boat being lowered immediately, I put off for the shore. The sight of a gunboat from the north had attracted a large crowd to the quay, and when I had delivered the despatches, and an announcement of the victory was posted outside the governor's house, the crowd became still larger. As I was making my way back to the landing-stage with difficulty, I found Don Luis's father, Señor Martinez, before me. His features were drawn, and it was in anxious tones that he inquired :

"Can you give me any news of my son, Señor Wildash?"

"I have brought him with me on board the gunboat, Señor Martinez," I answered. "He is wounded, but will soon be well again."

"Thank God he is not dead," Señor Martinez exclaimed, in accents of intense relief. "May I come with you and see him?"

"It would be better, señor, if you got a carriage ready at the landing-stage, and I will have him brought ashore without delay."

When I regained the gunboat I found Don Luis in a

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

state of great excitement, and he was much relieved when I told him that I had seen his father and had arranged to take him on shore at once. There was no longer any need to have him slung, cot and all, over the side of the ship, though he was still so weak that he had to be carried down the gangway into the boat.

As we rowed towards the shore again the young fellow feasted his eyes upon his native town. The setting sun was throwing a flood of golden light upon the land, endowing the scene with an unnatural beauty. Don Luis's eyes wandered from one end of the town to the other, till they rested on the cliffs where we had fought our duel.

"It seems a lifetime, señor, since we stood facing each other over there," he said, indicating the direction with a nod of his head. "And this is how you repay the unreasoning provocation which I gave you then!"

His reference to the provocation recalled to me my first meeting with Carita Montenar, when she witnessed our quarrel at the inn. I was bringing back to her now the cousin she had then defended, and I was doing my best to render happy the lives of two who at that time had manifested such antagonism to me. They would never guess how much this final effort cost me.

We found Señor Martinez waiting with a carriage at the landing-stage, and at Don Luis's request I entered the vehicle with them. The excitement of the afternoon, however, had been too great a strain upon the young man's strength, and he was so faint when he reached the house that he had to be put to bed at once. When I had seen him fall asleep, I prepared to take my leave.

"But, señor," said Señor Martinez, "you will, I hope, accept my hospitality, after the kindness you have shown my son, and will dine with me to-night?"

I was engaged to dinner with the governor, and told him so.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"At any rate, you will come and see us as often as you can while you remain in Valparaiso, and, forgetting the past, will count us as your friends?"

"I am quite willing to forget the past, señor," I answered. "With regard to your son, there is only one thing more that can be done for him, and that is to inform Señorita Montenar of his return. She proved so successful a nurse before that her services should certainly be obtained again."

"You are right, Señor Wildash," he replied. "Doña Caritá is at Santiago, but I will let her know that Luis has returned and is in need of her."

I took my leave, and as I bent my steps towards the governor's house I felt that my visits to the house of Señor Martinez would be few, for when the señorita was installed there the two young people would have no need of visitors.

CHAPTER XXIV

I WAS very disappointed to find quite a large number of persons in the governor's reception-room, and to learn that the *tête-à-tête* dinner to which I thought I was going to sit down had been magnified into a sort of public banquet, at which the officers of the gunboat and myself were to be the honored guests. Being senior in rank to the captain, I sat on the governor's right, and had to reply to the toast of the evening, besides being expected to sit out the interminable string of long-phrased Chilian speeches that succeeded it. Midnight had struck before I could contrive to slip away from a scene which was little to my humor, and to make my way to the "Fonda del Héspero."

I had taken the precaution to let Antonio know that I wanted a bed at the "Fonda" for the night, so that when I arrived there I had a hearty welcome from my friendly innkeeper, who led me to my old seat behind the screen, and placed a bottle of my favorite Urmenate on the table. I did not feel any need for wine after the banquet I had just attended, but I allowed him to pour me out a glass, and then I bade him sit down and join me with it.

"Viva Chile!" Antonio exclaimed, raising his glass for a toast; "and may she always have such brave defenders as Lord Cochrane and his English officers!"

"Are you less prudent than usual to-night, Antonio?" I asked, with a smile. "A year or eighteen months ago such a toast would have given offence to nearly all your guests."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Antonio smiled back with a knowing air.

"Things have changed since then, señor," he replied. "At that time Valdivia had not been taken, nor had the *Esmeralda* been cut out from under the forts at Callao. My house is now frequented by friends of the Republic, and there are but few Spanish partisans who still resort to it."

"You have none in the house at present, then?" I said.

"No, señor; but there is a room prepared for one. Señorita Montenar engaged it by letter two days ago, but she has not yet arrived, and I don't know what to think of it."

"She should have come two days ago?" I repeated, in surprise.

"Yes, señor; she wrote from Santiago to say that she would be here by the evening coach the day before yesterday, and I have heard nothing since."

I sat silent for a while, pondering on the unexpected news.

"Some accident may have happened to her," I said, a vague uneasiness at his story taking possession of me. "Do you know if she arrived in Valparaiso by coach on the day that you expected her?"

"No, señor, I have not inquired."

"Where is the coaching-office?" I asked, rising to my feet.

"In the Plaza Intendencia," Antonio replied; "but señor will serve no purpose by going there now, for it will not be open."

Antonio was right, of course. I could see no one at the office at this time of night. If it had not been for that tedious banquet I might have satisfied myself upon the point that evening. As it was, I should have to wait till the following day.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Have me called at daybreak, Antonio," I said. Then, feeling that some explanation was due, I added, "Señor Martinez has written to the señorita to come and nurse her cousin, and he will be anxious if he has no news of her."

Antonio looked at me curiously, then, saying, "Very good, señor," lit my candle and escorted me up-stairs.

The following morning I was up at sunrise, and reached the coaching-office at half-past five. The only occupant was an old woman, engaged in sweeping it out, who told me that the booking-clerk did not come till half-past six. I passed the intervening period as best I could, wandering uneasily about the plaza, and returned at the hour mentioned. About half a dozen persons were waiting in the office, and when the clerk appeared some ten minutes later I was one of a group of ten who wished to interview him.

As I had been the first upon the scene, I pushed my way to the desk before the others.

"Can you let me see the list of passengers," I asked, "who arrived from Santiago by the evening coach three days ago?"

"We have no list of those who come, señor—only those who go," he answered, with an evident want of interest in my case, now that he knew I was not an intending passenger, and glancing towards the other members of the group.

"Where, then, can I obtain the information?" I inquired.

"By letter from our office in Santiago. Now, señor, what can I do for you?" he continued, turning to one of the others who were waiting behind me.

I left the office keenly disappointed. No answer could be received from Santiago till the following evening, and by that time Señor Martinez would know if his letter

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

had reached the señorita. There was nothing to do but wait till then, and I returned to the "Fonda" for a cup of coffee, after which I made my way to Señor Martinez's house.

Don Luis, I heard, had a touch of fever, and the doctor said that great care must be taken, as in his present weak state matters might take a serious turn.

"Doña Caritá, I hope, will be here to-morrow evening," said Señor Martinez, "and then he will be in good hands."

I told him what I had heard at the "Fonda del Héspero," but he did not think there was any occasion for alarm.

"She must have found at the last moment that she could not get away," he said. "If she does not come herself, I shall no doubt get a letter from her to-morrow evening."

His words somewhat relieved my uneasiness, and as the gunboat had to wait at Valparaíso till further orders, I told Rodrigo to bring my things off to the "Fonda," where I intended to take up my quarters for the present.

The next twenty-four hours dragged slowly by. I inquired after Don Luis on the following morning, and heard that he was much the same. Señor Martinez had no news of Caritá, but felt confident that either she herself or a letter from her would arrive by the Santiago coach that evening. So certain was he of it that he agreed to meet the coach with me, to take charge of the señorita as soon as she appeared.

The coach came in punctually at six o'clock, but a very short inspection proved that Caritá Montenar was not a passenger. We then followed the mail-bag into the post-office, where it was opened, and its contents distributed to those who had called for letters. There were

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

several for Señor Martinez, but none of them came from the señorita.

We returned to the coaching-office, where we were just in time to catch the guard before he went away.

"Have you heard anything at your Santiago office of Señorita Montenar?" asked Señor Martinez, who knew the man by sight.

"The señorita and her maid came down to Valparaiso on my coach four days ago, señor," the guard replied.

Señor Martinez seemed unable to believe it.

"Are you quite sure you are not mistaken, my man?" he said.

"Quite sure, señor. No one who has ever seen the beautiful Señorita Montenar would mistake another lady for her."

"Do you know where she went to?"

"I do not, señor. I only saw the señorita and her maid enter a hired carriage and drive away."

We were both very silent as we walked slowly back in the direction of Señor Martinez's house. If the guard's tale was true—and there was no reason to doubt it, especially as it agreed with the letter Antonio had received—the señorita must be now in Valparaiso. But where? Señor Martinez knew of no friends of hers with whom she might be staying, and it was hardly likely that she would go to any other inn, without at least informing Antonio of the fact. An alternative remained. It was possible that she had embarked on a ship in the harbor on the night of her arrival, and had left the port for some other destination.

But before I could be induced to believe this last suggestion, I determined to make a thorough search in the town itself. Informing Señor Martinez of my intention, I parted with him before he reached his house,

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

and began an investigation of the visitors' books in all the principal hotels and inns. It was a longer matter than I had anticipated, and I had barely inspected half a dozen when it was time to close them for the night.

The following morning I resumed the search, and continued it, with brief intervals for meals, throughout the day. I visited every inn, and, I verily believe, every house that could possibly be a boarding-house, in these eighteen hours, but without success. This was all the more disheartening because I often had occasion to believe that I was upon the right track. On two occasions I came across the name of Señorita Montenar. One was a young girl at a hotel who had lately arrived there from Coquimbo with her father, and the other was an old maid who lived by herself in a boarding-house. Neither of them were in any way related or connected with Caritá Montenar.

I returned to the "Fonda" that evening exhausted and despairing, and not even Antonio, who was wont to look at the bright side of things, could say anything to reassure me. It was possible, of course, that the señorita might have taken a passage in a ship, but if not, there was certainly good reason for anxiety. Valparaiso, like many seaports at that time in South America, when the hand of justice was not sufficiently strong, contained some very disorderly elements among its poorer population. An unprotected lady, wearing valuable jewelry, who ventured in the lower quarters, might very possibly be robbed, and even murdered by them.

My visits to the shipping agents occupied the morning of the following day. As I inspected the books, I could hardly say whether I was more distressed or relieved at not finding the señorita's name upon them. By one o'clock I had called on all the principal firms and private owners with whom she might have taken a passage, and

SEÑORITA MONTEVAR

then, as a last resource, I determined to visit all the ships then lying in the harbor.

Taking the gunboat's gig, I rowed to each in turn, and although the captains of some of them admitted that they had passengers aboard whose names had not been entered in the books on shore, I found no trace of Señorita Montenar. I was returning at sunset to the landing-stage in a state of great despondency, when I saw, anchored off the meaner portion of the town, a brig which had hitherto escaped my notice. There was little use, I felt, in visiting her, but still I shaped my course in her direction, not liking to give in till every vessel had been searched. On nearing her my interest was aroused, for although, of course, she was not flying the Spanish flag, there was a Spanish look about her spars and rigging. This view was strengthened by the appearance of the crew and of the man who said he was her captain, when I hailed her at the ladder.

"Have you any passengers on board, captain?" I demanded.

"No, señor, I have not," replied the man, in Castilian Spanish.

"Nevertheless, captain, I will give myself the satisfaction of looking round your ship," I said, laying my hand upon the rope ladder which was hanging from the bulwarks.

The man, with an oath, laid hold of the top of it as if to shake me off. Anger flamed in his eyes, and his ill-kept beard and cadaverous face gave him indeed a villainous look.

"I am master of this ship," he cried, "and no one comes on board of her without my permission. My papers have been passed, and I am protected by the law."

If this were true, I had no authority to board the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

ship. But his demeanor had aroused my suspicions, and I decided to ascend. Telling a couple of my men, who carried cutlasses, to follow me, I began to mount the ladder. Whatever thoughts of resistance the captain may have entertained at first, he abandoned them on seeing my determined attitude, standing sullenly aside as I stepped on to the deck.

"Where do you come from?" I asked.

"From Talcahuano," he replied.

"And you are bound for?"

"Pisco, with a cargo of corn."

"Let me see your papers."

He led me along to his cabin, and, taking the papers out of a drawer, laid them before me. They were in perfect order, and I caught a mocking smile upon his lips as I returned them. But I kept my temper, and proceeded to examine the other cabins aft. They all bore traces of being occupied, with one exception. This was a roomy cabin with two bunks next to the captain's, and which had the appearance of being prepared for two fresh inmates.

"Who occupies this cabin, captain?" I inquired.

"No one at present, señor. It belongs to the mate and second mate, but as I wish to have some alterations done in my cabin, my wife and I are going to use it for a little time."

I proceeded to examine the whole ship, but my pains went unrewarded. There was no trace of any one but the crew on board. I re-entered the gig and put off for the shore, the captain bestowing on me an exulting look of triumph as the boat got under way.

I had no appetite for dinner at the "Fonda" that evening. Neither Antonio, with his cheerful optimism, nor Rodrigo—who had been told the story—with his resourceful mind, could give me any ground for hope.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

The police, represented by an inadequate civil guard, had been informed of the case, but I expected nothing from their assistance. I only dreaded their coming to inform me that a woman's lifeless body had been found in the lowest quarters of the town.

To make matters worse, about nine o'clock I received a letter from Señor Martinez, asking why I had not been there the last two days, and saying that his son's condition was causing grave anxiety. I saw that I must go at once and report what I had done, though I had no good news to take with me.

Señor Martinez listened attentively to what I had to say, and was evidently keenly disappointed when I could give him no cause for hope.

"My son made me promise to bring you to him, if you came," he said; "and although it is late, I shall be much pleased if you will gratify his wish."

I readily assented, and Señor Martinez led the way to Don Luis's bedroom. I was astonished at the change which the last two days had wrought in him, he was so thin and his cheeks burned so feverishly.

"It is very kind of you to come, Señor Wildash," he said, as I entered the room; "you know why I wanted to see you. Have you any news?"

He asked the question with such an eager look of inquiry in his eyes that it went against my heart to disappoint him. Yet it would be foolish to buoy him up with false hopes, and I answered:

"I have had no news, Don Luis. To-morrow, perhaps—"

"I see from your face that you have no hope, Señor Wildash, but I thank you for the efforts you have made. You will come and see me again within the next few days?"

I promised I would come, and as the interview was

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

evidently trying him, I took my leave. Señor Martinez pressed my hand at parting, but said nothing, and I saw that my news had caused him to give up all hope of his son's recovery.

My heart was very heavy as I walked back to the "Fonda." I had grown to like Don Luis during the time that I tended him on board ship, and although I envied him the happiness that would be his if the señoritas were found in time to save his life, I could not but be pained to see it thus ebbing away because she was not with him. But the weight of my own unhappiness at being unable to trace her, and the gloomy forebodings which I could not restrain, filled my mind to the exclusion of other people's sorrows, and I was wellnigh in despair when I at length reached the portals of the "Fonda."

As I turned to enter it, I almost fell over a ragged little Chilian girl, who was peeping through the narrow space between the folding-doors into the saloon beyond.

She retired hastily on my approach, evidently expecting a reprimand from me. Thinking that hunger perhaps had led her to gaze through the folding-doors, I held out a small silver coin to her. She took it eagerly, and mumbled her thanks, but, instead of running off with it, she remained standing in front of the door, as if unwilling to depart.

"You should be at home at this time of the night," I said, as the clocks began to strike the hour of twelve. "Come, run along, or the innkeeper will come out and send you away."

But she did not move, her round black eyes shining out beneath her matted hair as she looked up to me.

"I want to see some one who lives here," she answered. "Señor Ildas. Do you know him?"

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Sefior Ildas? No, child." Then a sudden thought struck me. "Was it Sefior Wildash?"

"Yes, Sefior Ildas," repeated the child, nodding her head; "is he in there now?"

"No, I am Sefior Wildash. What is it you want?"

She looked at me searchingly as I stood beneath the light of the lamp.

"Yes, sefior, you are fair and have blue eyes, and must be an Englishman. I have something for you."

She looked anxiously up and down the street as if she were afraid of being seen. Then, with a hurried movement, she pulled a little packet out of her pocket, and, thrusting it into my hand, ran hastily away.

I looked at the packet curiously. It was done up in brown paper neatly secured with string, being about two and a half inches square by half an inch thick. There was no address or writing of any kind upon it. I stood on the door-mat in the light of the lamp, and with the feeling of indulging an idle whim—for I could think of no one who would send me a packet by such a messenger—I cut the string and unfolded the brown paper. Beneath it lay another similar covering, folded in exactly similar fashion. This, when taken off, revealed a covering of white paper. With the reflection that the person who packed it must have been very anxious that its contents should not be damaged, I took off the white covering, only to find a similar one beneath. Four more layers of white paper succeeded each other in this fashion, and as the packet had now become quite thin and limp, I felt that I was the victim of a practical joke on the part of the ragged little girl, who was no doubt enjoying the success of her trick from some hiding-place on the opposite side of the street.

Annoyed at being taken in by so simple a device, I tore the packet across, and, throwing down the two halves, was

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

about to enter the inn, when I saw something bright glittering on the mat beneath me. As I picked it up and turned towards the lamp, it sparkled in the light, and I stood gazing at it in astonishment, for I recognized the señorita's diamond ring.

CHAPTER XXV

MY first act on realizing that this was in truth the señorita's ring was to be guilty of a weakness that men in their sober senses are apt to ridicule and condemn, but to which few have not succumbed at some period of their lives. What instinct prompts a lover—and the sensations which I now experienced, and which I was powerless to control, left no doubt in my mind that I must rank as such—to pour out his devotion, in the absence of his mistress, on some inanimate object which has come from her, it is difficult to say, but I know that I raised the jewel to my lips and kissed it passionately.

Then common-sense resumed her sway, and remembering the store the señorita set upon the ring, I realized that her plight must be desperate indeed for her to risk it as a messenger of her distress. Entering the "Fonda," I called for Rodrigo, who usually sat in a room beyond the dining-saloon, and who never retired till I had gone to bed. He answered immediately, and together we walked out into the street.

"I want your help to-night, Rodrigo," I said; "but first we must find a little girl who spoke to me at the door not two minutes since."

We crossed the street, and I was rejoiced to find her hiding in a doorway on the opposite side. She had evidently been watching the effect the packet would produce.

"Who sent you to me, child?" I asked.

She did not answer, but looked distrustfully at Rodrigo, who stood at my side.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"You need not be afraid of him," I said ; "he is, like me, your friend."

This seemed to reassure her, and she answered :

"A señorita sent me."

"And where does the señorita live?"

The child hesitated for a moment, as if the answer required more resolution than she could command ; then with an effort she replied :

"I will show you, señor, if you will follow me at a distance, so that you will not be noticed. When I stop and look down a street, you will know that it is the one in which the señorita lives. The house is in a narrow passage on the right-hand side."

So saying, she stepped out from the doorway, and when she had gone a little distance Rodrigo and I began to follow her. Evidently anxious to avoid the main thoroughfares, she took us along a series of streets and passages with which I was almost altogether unfamiliar, but which led in a direction parallel to the sea front. The child never hesitated or looked round, but moved steadily along, though I noticed that she avoided the few people who were still abroad by crossing over to the other side of the street, and keeping as far as possible within the shadow of the houses.

At length we reached what I knew must be the lowest quarter of the town, and began to cross some narrow streets running down to the quays which lined the edge of the bay. At the corner of one of these streets the child halted, turned to see if we had followed her, and then, looking down it, walked on at a quick pace and was lost to view. On gaining this street, at the corner of which, to my surprise, a hired carriage was standing empty, we turned down it, keeping to the right-hand side. After walking a little distance, we came to a passage such as the young girl had described. At the farther end of

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

it stood a dilapidated building, which in days gone by had probably been the residence of a wealthy citizen, but was now crumbling with decay. No sound came from it, but there were lights in two of the windows on the first floor. I had already explained to Rodrigo as we came along the character of the enterprise on which we were embarked, and now I said to him :

“ You stay here at the end of this passage, so that you may see any one who goes in or comes out. I will enter the house. If I summon you, come to my assistance ; if not, remain here till I return.”

Rodrigo readily accepted the part assigned to him, and I, drawing my sword, which I preferred to a pistol on account of its silence and reliability, proceeded down the passage. I found an open space in the front of the house, and an archway in the centre of the building, leading to a court-yard within. Halting for a moment, I listened attentively. The house seemed absolutely still, and the only sounds which broke the silence of the midnight air were the song of a drunken reveller as he reeled homeward, and the distant wash of the water against the quay at the end of the street. With a final look at the windows, which gave no sign of life, I passed through the archway, and mounted the wooden staircase in the court-yard which led to the first floor.

I had barely reached the balcony which ran round the four sides of the building, when a door at the end of the side on which I found myself opened, and a man passed out. As he turned to close the door behind him, the light from the room fell full upon his face, and I recognized Miguel, the cross-eyed Spanish sergeant. Closing the door as quietly as he had opened it, he walked straight towards me, and it was plain that he could not see me. For a moment I was tempted to await his coming and strike him dead without a word of warning. But al-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

though it would have been nothing more than he deserved, my better feelings gained the day. Stepping forward into the light thrown from a window, I raised my sword and cried :

“ Defend yourself, Miguel, you villain, or I will kill you as you stand !”

The fellow halted within the area lighted by the window, and turned very pale.

“ It is Señor Wildash !” he exclaimed, beneath his breath.

“ Yes, it is Señor Wildash,” I answered, “ and he has a long account to settle with you. Come, draw that sword of yours !” I added, for I noticed that he carried one.

Miguel obeyed, seeing that there was no help for it, and as soon as he was on guard I made a vigorous assault upon him. The fellow fought well, as even cowards do when they are brought to bay. Three times I felt that I had him at my mercy, and three times he managed to evade the blow, which should have been a fatal one. But I saw by his pale face and heaving chest that he was powerless against me, and I was expecting every minute to find an opening for the final thrust, when my opponent made a feint at slipping. I stayed my hand to allow him to recover himself, and in a moment he had turned and fled headlong round the balcony. I followed him, expecting that he would take refuge in a room, but to my chagrin he rushed down a second staircase—which had escaped my notice—into the court-yard, and disappeared beneath the archway.

A moment’s reflection showed me that he could not avoid Rodrigo, and, knowing that the boatswain was a match for him, I sheathed my sword and walked towards the door from which Miguel had emerged. Having received no answer to my knock, I entered, and saw the

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

señorita standing in the doorway of an inner room, looking with piteous anxiety to see who had come in. As soon as she recognized me she uttered a little cry of relief and ran to meet me. I caught her outstretched hands in mine.

"Thank God that you have come!" she said. "You do not know what I have suffered. But you—are you unhurt? I heard the sound of fighting and fled into the other room."

"I am untouched!" I answered.

"And—that man?" I felt her two small hands tremble in my own.

"He fled, but Rodrigo is below and will see that he does not escape."

"He drugged our coffee, and poor Isabel lies in there unconscious. I hardly touched it, and so did not succumb. Oh, it has been terrible! You will take us away from here at once?"

She shivered as she spoke, and the temptation came upon me, forgetful of Don Luis's prescriptive rights, to take her in my arms and soothe her like a frightened child, when the latch of the door lifted and Rodrigo entered. He was perfectly quiet and self-possessed, but a curious light gleamed in his eye.

"What of Miguel?" I asked.

"He did not escape, señor, although he managed to pass me at the end of the passage."

"Which way did he go?"

"He ran straight down the street to the quay, but I overtook him as he reached the steps, and he will never trouble you again, señor."

"Did you leave his body there?"

"No, señor, there was a boat with two men and a woman waiting at the steps. As I pierced him to the heart he fell headlong into the boat, which rowed off with him to a brig anchored close by."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

I remembered the brig I had seen in the afternoon, and the empty cabin, which had evidently been prepared for the señorita and her maid.

"Was there any one besides Miguel in the house?" I asked the señorita.

"Yes, a woman, but when the fighting commenced she escaped by a door from the inner room, which leads, I believe, to the back of the house, and which, like the door of this room, was always locked against us."

"That must have been the woman you saw in the boat, Rodrigo," I said, "and she is on board the brig at the present time. I will have her arrested before many hours have passed."

"It is too late, señor, for the brig began to weigh anchor as soon as the boat reached her, and with a fair wind she will be out of the harbor in half an hour's time."

It was evidently hopeless to think of catching the woman now, and I turned to the work immediately at hand.

"Is that carriage still waiting in the street?" I asked Rodrigo.

"Yes, señor, I have engaged it."

"Isabel lies in that room drugged. You carry her down to the carriage, while I assist the señorita."

Rodrigo started, and showed symptoms of alarm. When, however, on entering the room, he saw that she was in a heavy slumber, his courage returned, and taking her up in his arms, he strode off lightly with his burden. The señorita and I followed, entering the carriage in which lay Isabel's prostrate figure. Rodrigo mounted the box, and the carriage started off.

As we drove through the narrow, winding streets of the sleeping town the señorita told me all that had happened to Isabel and herself since they had arrived in

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Valparaiso six days previously, and I saw how near success the clever plot had been. The day before she left Santiago she received a letter from Valparaiso purporting to be written by a priest, and saying that a former maid of hers, whom she had been obliged to dismiss for dishonesty, lay on her death-bed, and wished to receive her late mistress's forgiveness from her own lips before she died. Wholly unsuspecting, the señorita wrote back to say that she would come on the following day, and at the same time sent a note to Antonio engaging rooms at his inn. On arriving at her destination, in order to lose no time, she drove at once with Isabel to the address given by the priest, but they had no sooner entered the outer room than the woman who opened the door shut it and turned the key upon them, while Miguel made his appearance from the inner room and said they were his prisoners. Isabel screamed, and the señorita alternately implored and threatened, all to no purpose. The house was too far back for screams to be easily heard in the street, and, even supposing they had been noticed, matrimonial quarrels were of too frequent occurrence in the neighborhood to attract attention.

Miguel said that his master, Don Guido Villamil, had instructed him to take the señorita and her maid by ship to Pisco, whence they could travel by land to Callao. Here he had prepared a house to which he intended to take his wife, as he declared the señorita had consented to become. A Spanish brig was expected at Valparaiso in a day or two, and, as they had to go aboard of her, it would be best, Miguel said, to go quietly; for go they should, either peacefully or by brute force.

The two women saw no hope of escape. They were securely locked in the house, and there was no way of communicating with the outer world. On the third day of their captivity, however, the woman who lived with

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Miguel brought in a young girl to help her and run her errands. From this girl the señorita learned that one of Lord Cochrane's English officers had arrived in Valparaiso with despatches from the admiral, and, in the hope that it might be myself, she determined to try and inform me of her plight. She was afraid of Miguel's violent temper should she be discovered writing a letter, and so she hit upon the plan of sending her ring, which, if intercepted, would at least convey no meaning to the sergeant's mind. The jewel had performed its mission only just in time. The brig had arrived that afternoon, a carriage had been hired to take them to the quay, and to make sure of no hitch occurring Miguel had attempted to drug them both. In another quarter of an hour they would have been on board the brig and under way for Pisco.

"So, you see," the señorita concluded, looking up at me with a joyous smile, which the light of dawn now enabled me to see, "the ring has justified its old tradition, and has brought assistance to its owner when she was most in need of it. You are my deliverer, Señor Wildash. How can I thank you for all that you have done for me?"

I drew the ring from my pocket, and, taking her small hand, placed it on the finger on which she always wore it.

"I can ask nothing better, señorita, than to be always near to help you when you are in trouble," I said, and I bent and kissed her hand. The color mounted to her cheek, and there was a light in her eyes which I had never seen before. A mad hope seized me, and I was on the point of giving expression to my thoughts, when the señorita's next words brought me to my senses.

"You have not told me," Señor Wildash," she said, as she withdrew her hand, "where you are taking me to?"

SEÑORITA MONTEÑAR

Don Luis's feverish face and pleading eyes appeared before me, and I saw my duty clearly.

"I have some news for you, señorita," I said. "The despatches which I brought from Lord Cochrane contained an account of a victory which we had gained over the Spaniards at Callao. We boarded the *Esmeralda* in our boats and took her out of the harbor from beneath the guns of the forts. Your cousin, Don Luis Martinez, was on board of her."

"Then he was killed?" she said. The tender anxiety in her tone went like a dagger to my heart.

"No, señorita, but he was wounded, and I have brought him back to Valparaiso with me. He now lies at his father's house in a very critical condition. He is always asking for you, and it depends on you whether he survives or not."

"Poor, poor Luis!" she exclaimed. "I must go to him at once. Will you kindly tell the coachman, Señor Wildash, to drive us to his house?"

"I have already done so, señorita," I replied.

Something in my tone must have struck her, for she looked at me with a puzzled expression in her eyes. I turned away my face, and the action must have chilled her, for it was some time before she spoke again.

"You are very silent, señor," she said. "I wanted to ask you a question, but perhaps you would rather that I did not speak."

"What is it that you want to know, señorita?" I inquired.

"Did my cousin tell you what had become of Don Guido Villamil?"

"No, señorita, it was I who told your cousin. He was among the slain on board the *Esmeralda*."

She clasped her hands together and murmured, "May Heaven forgive his sins!" Another silence followed be-

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

tween us, and then the carriage stopped at Señor Martínez's house.

The señor himself, who had been up all night with his son, received us at the door, and almost broke down when he found that the señorita had really come at last.

"I have no fear now on my son's behalf," he said, in a voice quivering with emotion.

Isabel, still unconscious, was carried into the house, and then the señorita turned to say good-bye to me.

"You will come and see us soon, señor?" she said, as she held out her hand.

"If I can, señorita, but I may have to sail again at any hour."

The gray light of dawn fell full upon her face, and was responsible, no doubt, for its ashen color.

"Good-bye, señor, and may God requite you for your kindness to me!"

Was I mistaken, or did the small hand tremble as I touched it with my lips?

CHAPTER XXVI

A FORTNIGHT passed, and my stay in Valparaiso was drawing to a close. The gunboat on which I had sailed from Callao was starting on a cruise to Valdivia and the south, and I had obtained permission to accompany her. It was a lucky opportunity, for I longed to get away from the Chilian seaport. Though I had not gone to the house of Señor Martinez again, I had made inquiries every day after Don Luis's health, and had received progressively encouraging reports on each occasion. He would soon be able to see his friends, and if I stayed in the town much longer I could hardly avoid paying him a visit. I was glad, then, that the departure of the gunboat on the morrow afforded me a means of escaping this unpleasant duty. For, although Don Luis's engagement with his cousin had not yet been publicly announced, I had no doubt that it had taken place, and I could not yet steel myself to be a witness of his happiness.

On this last morning I was sitting on the balcony of my room on the first floor of the "Fonda," when I saw Rodrigo, who had gone out to make some purchases, returning down the street, while, at the same time, Isabel made her appearance from the opposite direction. The boatswain had evidently seen her, and, thinking that he was unobserved, hastened forward to gain the shelter of the "Fonda" before he was detected. But Isabel had no intention of suffering him to escape, and, quickening her pace also, intercepted him beneath my balcony.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"Rodrigo," she exclaimed, in injured tones, "surely you have not forgotten me!"

The words recalled to Rodrigo their parting interview at the hotel in Valdivia, and he took alarm, thinking she had come to claim him.

"Forgotten you, Isabel?" he answered, with an uneasy attempt at humor; "no, I am not likely to do so. Do you know how much you weigh? The last time we met I had to carry you, and my arms are aching from it still."

Isabel blushed, but she would not be diverted from her purpose, and continued:

"Dear, good Rodrigo, how kind you were! They told me all about you when I came to myself."

Rodrigo saw that he had gained nothing by his effort at hilarity, and, anxious at any cost to end the interview, he said:

"Tell me what you want, Isabel, and let me know the worst at once."

She looked at him with a well-assumed expression of surprise.

"You need not be so cross, Rodrigo," she replied; "I only wanted to introduce you to my future husband;" and, turning round, she beckoned to a young man who stood loitering about a short way down the street.

Rodrigo's expression underwent a sudden change from one of keen anxiety to intense relief, and when Isabel's fiancé joined them he exclaimed:

"Are you really going to marry Isabel?"

"Yes," replied the young man, in some confusion; "that is, if she will marry me."

Rodrigo seized his hand and wrung it with a sailor's strength of grip.

"You are a right good fellow," he said, "and I like the look of you. You have taken a great weight off my

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

mind. Come round to the ‘Fonda Buena’ this evening, and we will drink Isabel’s health together.”

Isabel broke into a merry laugh at the sudden change in his demeanor, and then, drawing a letter from her pocket, she said:

“ Will you please give this letter to your master? It is from Don Luis.”

Rodrigo took the letter, and, bidding the happy pair good-morning, entered the “Fonda” and delivered it to me. I opened it at once and read as follows:

“ DEAR SEÑOR WILDASH,—My cousin Carita has proved so good a nurse that I am able to leave my bedroom for the first time to-day. A report has reached me that you are sailing to-morrow, in the gun-boat, for the south. May I ask you to do me the kindness of paying me a visit before you go?

“ Your friend,

“ LUIS MARTINEZ.”

There was no refusing such a pleasantly worded invitation, and, as I had to go, it would be best to go at once and get it over. Perhaps, after all, I might see Don Luis alone, and there would be little to pain me in the interview.

This conjecture, fortunately, proved to be correct. On reaching Señor Martinez’s house I was shown into a room, where I found Don Luis by himself, seated in an easy-chair. Although still thin and pale, he was quite a different man than when I saw him last, and wore a happy, contented look, such as I had never observed in him before.

“ It is very good of you to come, Señor Wildash,” he said, as he motioned me to a chair. “ I did not like to think of your going away for a long trip to the south without having thanked you for all that you have done for me.”

I begged him not to talk in such a strain, as I had done

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

no more for him than for the other wounded who were under my charge.

"Oh yes, you did, señor," he insisted, "for I have heard from others how carefully you nursed me, while I was still unable to recognize you. What makes it all the stranger is that I had done nothing to deserve such treatment at your hands. In fact, from the day that I provoked the duel with you, I have acted in a way to make you my enemy rather than my friend. But you have one triumph, señor: you have made me a convert to your views, and I intend henceforward to support the land of my birth, instead of the country which sends her worst subjects to retain her sovereignty for her."

"Your father will be pleased to find that you have changed your opinions," I observed.

"Yes, and I think that you have made another convert also. By the bye, señor, you have not yet congratulated me."

My heart sank within me. He was about to inform me of his engagement with his cousin.

"On what am I to congratulate you?" I asked.

"Why, on having a nurse like Caritá, who has been clever enough to get me down-stairs in a fortnight. You must go and compliment her on her work. You will find her in the room on the opposite side of the passage. I asked her to go in there while I had a talk with you."

I did not understand what was Don Luis's object, but if I had to see the señorita, I would rather do so when she was alone than in his presence. Accordingly, I rose to act on his suggestion, and as I reached the door he said, with a smile upon his lips:

"You might ask her also to explain the meaning of the piece of ribbon which she pinned inside your coat. It has a significance, I believe, which might be interesting to you."

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

Still further mystified, I left him and crossed the passage to the opposite room, the door of which was open. The señorita stood at a table arranging some flowers in a vase. Her face was turned away from me, and on the thickly carpeted floor she had not heard my step. I paused for a moment, anxious to impress her image on my memory. The graceful figure in black—for she was still in mourning for her mother—bending over the table, and the delicate white hands deftly composing the bouquet of flowers, made a picture the charm of which will always linger with me. Two French windows were thrown open to the terrace, and from the garden came the pleasant hum of insect life and the perfume of sweet-smelling flowers.

A change in her position caused her to catch sight of me, and the color rose to her cheeks.

"I did not know that you were there, Señor Wildash," she said, with a pretty smile. "How quietly you move!"

Her work as nurse had evidently done her health no harm, and I thought that I had never seen her so full of beauty and of life.

"The door was open, señorita," I replied, "and the carpets are very thick. I have just seen Don Luis, and must congratulate you on your skill in nursing. I have never seen so great a change effected in so short a time."

"I am very glad you think so," she said, evidently pleased by my report. "But you must not give me all the credit. He has been an excellent patient, and did everything that he was told."

"I am not surprised at that, señorita, for he is doubly indebted to you for his life. It was the sight of that little piece of ribbon you pinned upon my coat which made me examine him once more after he had been taken away as dead."

"You did not forget about the ribbon, then?" she

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

said, with a pleased smile. "I am very glad that it helped to save my cousin's life."

"Yes, señorita, when you gave it to me, you said that it would serve as a token to remind me of my promise to treat with consideration the prisoners and wounded of the enemy. Don Luis informs me that it bears another signification also. Will you tell me what it is?"

I had drawn close to her, and looked down into her face. The color mounted to her cheeks, but she made no response, nor did her eyes return my gaze.

"Will you send me away without your answer, then, señorita?" I said.

She glanced swiftly up at me, and in her eyes there was a look which swept away all my good resolutions. Forgetful of Don Luis, I did what on two previous occasions I had all but done—I caught her in my arms and kissed her soft, fair cheek.

"Will you tell me now, Carità, what was the meaning of the ribbon?"

She smiled through her confusion, and, without looking up, replied :

"Don Luis was thinking of an old custom in Andalusia, from which province our family came. At a country-dance on a certain day of the year, the girls pin favors to their partners' coats."

"And what does that mean, Carità?"

"It depends upon the way in which it is done. But it may mean that when the girl gives her favor, she gives —she gives her heart as well."

"Tell me that it was what you meant when you pinned the ribbon to my coat?"

She looked up at me with mischief in her eyes, and made a pretence of trying to disengage herself from my restraining grasp.

SEÑORITA MONTENAR

"But, señor, this is violence and intimidation ! Would you have me say it on compulsion ?"

"Do not tantalize me, darling," I answered, "for I love you more than all the world. Tell me that you love me, too."

She threw her arms around my neck, and, drawing down my head to hers, kissed me passionately upon the lips.

"I have loved you, dearest, ever since—since I saw you first," she answered.

Then I suddenly remembered poor Don Luis.

"But how about your cousin?" I asked. "What will become of him? I have been expecting every day to hear you were engaged to him."

Caritá gave a charming little laugh.

"Engaged to Don Luis?" she repeated. "No, he is very good and kind, and I am very fond of him, but he knew long ago that I could never be his wife, because my heart was no longer mine to give. It was only during the last few days that he has guessed to whom I gave it."

My thoughts reverted to another subject, and I said :

"Caritá, I am still fighting under the Chilian flag, which is your flag now?"

She gave a little sigh. "I have abandoned all my former aspirations in behalf of Spain. I will remember that I am a Chilian, and henceforward will be loyal to the government of my country."

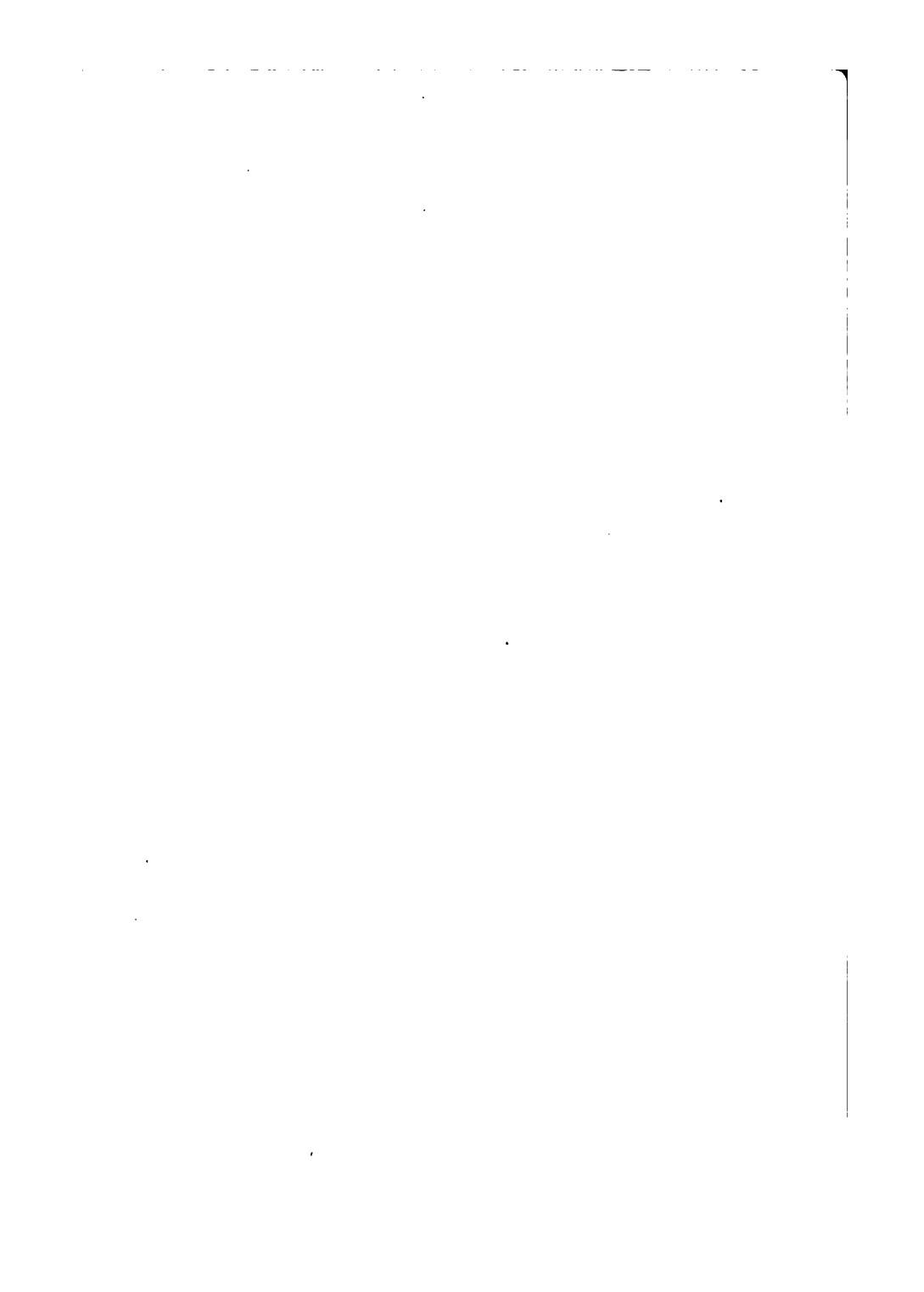
"Then you wish me to continue in her service, and—to sail to-morrow for the south?"

The young girl turned pale, and clung more closely to me.

"No, dearest, I cannot let you go ! It is too much to expect from so recent a convert. Give me more time before you ask so great a sacrifice!"

THE END

AMERICAN LIBRARY.
NEW YORK



**THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
REFERENCE DEPARTMENT**

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

